

Testimony in support of CB 15-2016

Peter Green [pgreen547@gmail.com]

Sent: Monday, March 21, 2016 10:12 PM

To: CouncilMail

Cc: Meyers, Jeff; Jean Sedlacko [jsedlacko@verizon.net]

Chairman Ball and members of the council:

My name is Peter Green. My wife Ann and I have lived at 9117 Northfield Road Ellicott City 21042 for almost 40 years.

I support CB 15-2016. If it passed as written, that would be fine. You could improve it by adding the following new section on rear yard setback after Front Yard Setback (p.3) -

REAR YARD SETBACKS: THE REQUIRED FRONT YARD SETBACK SHALL BE ESTABLISHED AS THE AVERAGE OF THE EXISTING FRONT YARD SETBACKS OF THE BLOCK FACE AREA OR THE AREA WITHIN 500 FEET IN EITHER DIRECTION OF THE SUBJECT PROPERTY, WHICHEVER IS LESS. THE BLOCK FACE AREA CONSISTS OF THE AREA BETWEEN THE SUBJECT PROPERTY AND THE INTERSECTION OF ANY TWO STREETS MEASURED ALONG THE SIDE OF THE STREET THAT THE SUBJECT PROPERTY IS LOCATED. WHERE THERE IS A VACANT LOT IN THE BLOCK FACE AREA, THE REQUIRED REAR YARD SETBACK FOR THE ZONING DISTRICT SHALL BE USED FOR THAT LOT IN CALCULATING THE AVERAGE REAR YARD SETBACK. IF THE SETBACK ESTABLISHED IN THIS SECTION CONFLICTS WITH THE SETBACK ESTABLISHED IN THE ZONING REGULATIONS, THEN THE MORE RESTRICTIVE SETBACK SHALL APPLY;

The rationale for this proposed addition is that behind my house is a wedge-shaped 1.03 acre lot at 4218 Club Court. There is just about enough street frontage on Club Court for a driveway. For the first 38 years we lived in our house, this was a vacant lot. Then a developer bought it and put a house at one end of it, submitting a subdivision plan to create another lot (and build another house) by dividing the lot. The back of the new house, at its closest point, is 58.5 feet from the property line between 4218 and 9117. My house is 90 feet from that same line. Similarly for my neighbors' houses (90 feet).

The subdivision plan has been caught by APFO (Dunloggin MS is more than 15% over capacity for the next several years), but this only delays subdivision and construction by 4 years under APFO.

The front yard setback provision of CB 15, along with the rear yard setback addendum I have proposed, might have made the lot unbuildable, as many of us had thought for about 40 years that it was because of the shape and the steep slope. Back in the late '70s, I proposed to my then-neighbor, Charles Irwin - a former member of the Howard County Planning Board - that we go together, buy that lot, divide it in some way and basically make it disappear. He declined to do so, saying that it was not a buildable lot. He's not around to see the two-story house that I see out my back windows every day in the erstwhile vacant lot.

Nowhere is it written that every lot ever created in Howard County must be buildable.

Thanks for your consideration.

Angie Boyter

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March 21, 2016

Howard County Council

George Howard Building

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SUBJECT: CB 15-2016

Dear Calvin, Jon, Jen, Greg, and Mary Kay,

I will not be able to come testify at your public hearing tonight, but I wanted to go on record in support of Council Bill 15-2016 and to thank Councilmember Weinstein for his continuing interest in the established communities and older neighborhoods of Howard County.

Although I support the bill, I consider it a “tweak” in the direction of protecting the neighborhoods. We need much more attention to the protection of neighborhoods where people already live as opposed to those where people have not yet made a commitment. One of the stated purposes of Section 16.127, Residential Infill Development, is to “Encourage investment in older established communities.” The best investment is that made by existing homeowners, who maintain and improve their properties, as my neighbors and I have in Dunloggin since the community was established in the mid-1950s. In order for homeowners to want to make such investments and to feel they will recoup those investments when they sell their homes, they need to feel some confidence that their neighborhood will not decline.

It is the responsibility of our county to implement land use policies that keep established neighborhoods from decline, and poorly done infill is a major threat. My community has already suffered irreparable deterioration as a result of infill that should not have been allowed. You can’t tear down those homes that are causing increased runoff, more traffic problems, and deterioration in the aesthetic appearance of our yards, but I am calling on you to act so that the community I have called home for almost 50 years does not deteriorate any further.

In the current bill, I especially appreciate the requirements that setbacks be more compatible with that of existing homes and, most important, that drainage and stormwater management be considered. Runoff has been a serious problem in my neighborhood since infill began accelerating, and I have significant

boggy areas in my yard after every heavy rain. This did not occur for the first 40 or so years I lived there.

The new section setting standards on driveways is an attempt to address some of the issues involving shared driveways, but shared driveways are simply a bad idea and should be discouraged. If lots cannot be configured so that each property has access to the street, that should be a sufficient basis for denying the subdivision of the property. Stacking homes behind each other in an R-12 or R-20 community is ugly and unnecessary. It creates an environment that is not as appealing to potential buyers and hurts property values for existing residents. Overall, it is not beneficial to the county.

Section 16.127 (c) (1) strengthens the buffering required if the unit type of the infill is not the same as the existing homes, but it does not go NEARLY far enough. ALL infill should be the same as existing unit types. It would be irresponsible of the county to allow different types of units to be put down in the middle of an existing community that has an established character.

There is one proposed change to Section 16.127 that I do not support, and that is to Section 16.127 (a) (1) that says the purpose of the section is to “focus development” in areas with public facilities. I can understand that you do not want to overdevelop areas without public services, but wording like this has been used to ENCOURAGE development of and disruption to existing neighborhoods. If it happens, it happens, but do not encourage it.

This bill is a start, but I urge you to do more to regulate infill. Properly implementing infill will likely result in less infill, which means less overall growth. If so, so be it. Howard County should be more interested in quality of life and not just quantity of residents.

Sincerely,

Angie Boyter