



Howard County Citizens Association

Since 1961...

The Voice Of The People of Howard County

Date: 17 June 2019

Subject: HCCA Testimony -- CR97-2019 regarding Affordable Housing – Enterprise Development

One of the hallmarks of our broken political system is how it asymmetrically benefits wealthy developers and political influencers while leaving the crumbs for the rest of the voters. The county gives \$100s of millions in tax increment financing to one wealthy developer, while the school system attempts to scrounge \$8 million to prevent class size increases that would hurt many families. It would provide 100s of units in density bonuses to developers in exchange for 10s of units of affordable housing that have yet to materialize in Downtown Columbia.

CR97 is a case study of Howard County's dysfunction.

First- it is dubbed as a "mixed-income" affordable housing project. Yet, of the 48 units proposed, 43 are low-income housing. This is not a mixed-income housing project. Instead of concentrating all the low-income housing in one project, why not require them in all projects without exemptions?

To date, none of the affordable housing homes in the models that would work- such as Downtown Columbia plan have come on line. Howard Hughes was given not only additional density, but nearly \$100 million in tax increment financing, and a very expensive DRRA, with zero affordable housing to show for it to date.

Second- Many may remember the wedge issue during the APFO legislation where language was added to exempt certain projects if they meet four conditions: at least 40% of the project should serve those with 60% of area median income, the project is seeking or has received low income housing tax credits, the project has received the county executive's support, and a hearing by the county council.

Well we are now at that hearing and this project asks for an APFO waiver.

The HCCA is not taking a position on this project. We know the county is in dire need of more affordable housing not just for young families but also for retirees. But the county will not solve this problem 43 houses at a time in a housing project that doesn't employ a model that is truly mixed income.

In addition, families who benefit from such projects deserve better. Exempting projects from APFO does not help the children who would attend overcrowded schools. Children from low-income families are disproportionately impacted because of poor school infrastructure.

What is the goal here? To cram disadvantaged children into inequitable situations and use that inequity as political rhetoric for the next election?

The HCCA suggests the following:

First- remove the term “Mixed-Income” from this resolution. Unless the goal is to redefine the term this is not a mixed-income project.

Second- we ask that you use this opportunity to start a real conversation about affordable housing. Instead of being part of a system that uses the topic as a wedge issue to shape inequitable programs, we ask you to stop the exemptions, change the MIHU fee-in-lieu structure to market-rate, to hold Howard Hughes accountable and provide affordable housing in its projects.

We need a comprehensive solution to this pressing problem and we urge you to act expeditiously.

Thank you.

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HCCA Board of Directors