



HCCA

Howard County Citizens Association

Since 1961... The Voice of the People of Howard County

Date: April 16, 2020

Re: CB13-2020 – The Affordable Housing Retention Act

The HCCA strongly opposes this bill and requests that it either be withdrawn or voted down.

The County currently has an effort underway that addresses Affordable Housing in the County; the Housing Opportunities Master Plan Task Force (Task Force). For decades the County has not had a comprehensive approach to siting Affordable Housing. The approach has been piece meal and the outcome for current Affordable Housing reflects that piece meal approach. Affordable Housing is now concentrated in older Columbia Villages including, Oakland Mills, Owen Brown, Long Reach, and Wilde Lake. Those existing apartment complexes are now 30 to 50 years old and therefore can be cheaply bought and in many cases are owned by the Howard County Housing Commission. The result has been a concentration of poverty and Free and Reduced Meal recipients in the county schools. This has resulted in a very contentious school redistricting in the last year. If passed there will be bad consequences since this bill will allow more older apartment complexes to be bought in existing low income and poverty areas east of US29 thereby continuing to concentrate poverty and negatively affecting schools. For example, Oakland Mills has four apartment complexes totaling approximately 980 units.. Approximately 40% are currently Affordable Housing. Four years ago the Howard County Housing Commission (HCHC) attempted to also buy Columbia Pointe that contains 324 units. Fortunately, after many meetings with HCHC, they were dissuaded from buying the complex. If that had occurred, 70% of the apartments would have become Affordable Housing and would have added to the concentration of low income and poverty issues in redistricting. Columbia Pointe was subsequently bought by a private company and they invested \$11 million in upgrading the units.

The Routes 1 and 40 corridors have exploded in development with high density housing to meet the smart growth plans from the early 90s. Much of the density includes developments with 20 to as high as 50 percent affordable housing set aside. An example of this is the River Watch community in Elkridge. When you consider many of the developments along the corridors which consists of hundreds of units and at these percentages, the affordable housing has and will add up quickly. The county must be able to meet the needs of the social economic environment it is creating and thus far, it is struggling to do that.

The remainder of the County has not had much Affordable Housing even when new apartment complexes are built since developers can pay a Fee-in-Lieu instead of providing affordable units. The Fee-in-Lieu must stop. The result has been a concentration of Affordable Housing mainly east of US29. This bill would make this situation even worse under this Bill and not spread-out Affordable Housing throughout the County.

The established Task Force will hopefully provide a comprehensive approach to Affordable Housing. Let the Task Force come up with their recommendations especially considering the County Executive and the Council approved \$400,000 in consultant services. Although this will obviously take a longer to do, it will provide a much better outcome for Affordable Housing in our county then CB13-2020.

Please allow the Task Force to do its work and **WITHDRAW** or vote **AGAINST** this bill.

Paul Verchinski
HCCA Board of Director