



HCCA

Howard County Citizens Association

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

Date: October 18, 2021

Re: CB69 and 70-2021, Funding the purchase of Development Rights in Western HoCo
POSITION: STRONGLY AGAINST

I am Paul Verchinski and reside in Columbia. As a Member of the Howard County Citizens Association, HCCA I am authorized to speak on their behalf.

The HCCA opposes this bill and requests that it either be tabled, withdrawn or voted down.

The County currently has paid out or committed to approximately \$170 million to purchase development rights to maintain Agricultural Preservation. These two bills propose to pay about \$5.7 million in installment payments and levying of county taxes for such payments. Out year bond capital and interest obligations now comprise 12% of future county budgets.

I have been on the HoCobyDesign, Public Advisory Committee (PAC) as an appointee of this Council. Over the past year, I have learned that there is no draft of the Future Land Use Map (FLUM) that includes potential development in Western Howard County other than at “Rural Crossroads”. The PAC suggested that affordable housing developments take place in western Howard County. We were told that there is no path forward to develop affordable housing developments in about two thirds of the County that represents the West because of dedicated Open Space and purchases of previous development rights that already encumber the land into permanent Agricultural Preservation. We were also told that it is not economical to extend the Public Service Area (PSA) to the West since there are no contiguous large parcels. Except for two areas, that are contiguous to the PSA, the FLUM indicates no PSA extensions into western parts of the county.

Inquiring minds, therefore, need to ask – why are we then buying additional Development Rights when no affordable housing subdivision development is tentatively forecast in Western Howard County in the draft FLUM? It is time to revisit this Agricultural Preservation ordinance that currently sets aside 20% of the transfer tax for this purpose. Ordinances need to be periodically reevaluated to see if they are in the best interests of county taxpayers. Just because we have done an ordinance in the past does not mean that it should continue.

Since the emphasis in HoCobyDesign draft FLUM is to provide “affordable housing”, we suggest that tax dollars previously used to buy Development Rights instead support the purchase of permanent land trusts owned by the County that can make housing affordable instead of continuing to buy Development Rights that will never be used.

The HCCA has always advocated for County preservation as stated on our website. However in these cases before you one has to fully analyze the pros and cons to carefully decide what is best for your constituents, the taxpayers and voters of our County and the FLUM.

Please allow the draft FLUM to be provided to you for legislative approval prior to any action at this time on funding the purchase of any new Development Rights.

/s/
Paul Verchinski
HCCA Board Member