



HCCA

Howard County Citizens Association

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

Date: 3 May 2025

Subject: Support for CB27-2025

Dear Council Members,

The Howard County Citizens Association (HCCA) expresses its support for CB27-2025 concerning Open Meetings – Waiver and Variance Requests.

This proposed bill to amend the Howard County Code, which requires the evaluation of Protection of Wetlands, Streams, and Steep Slopes waivers and Forest Conservation variances, is straightforward. We agree with Council Member Liz Walsh that the provisions of the Maryland Open Meetings Act regarding waivers and variances are appropriate. Therefore, we respectfully request your consideration to vote in favor of CB27-2025, especially if you believe in ensuring transparency for your constituents.

If passed, CB27 will enhance transparency and community involvement in the process of granting environmental waivers and variances for projects that might negatively impact wetlands, streams, steep slopes, and mature forests. The concerns raised during public testimony by the Maryland Building Industry Association, suggesting that increased transparency and public scrutiny would lead to delays and reduce housing supply, are unfounded. The idea that public oversight would delay essential housing projects presupposes that such waivers need to be granted improperly and without public knowledge. It also presumes that any improper granting would be reversed due to public criticism. Both assumptions lack credibility and do not justify obstructing transparent oversight.

Environmental projects often provoke controversy as they permanently alter viewsheds and sensitive habitats valued by many residents. Yet, those most affected by these waivers and variances are frequently excluded from the discussion and decision-making processes. A favorable vote on CB27-2025 will ensure the opportunity for community awareness and engagement before waivers and variances are granted. We urge you to vote in favor of this bill.

Thank you for your consideration.

Stu Kohn
HCCA President