

Action Committee for Transit

P.O. Box 7074, Silver Spring, MD 20907

April 13, 2007

Mrs. Marilyn Praisner

President, Montgomery County Council

100 Maryland Ave.

Rockville, MD 20850

Subject: MNCPPC Budget

Dear Mrs. Praisner:

The Action Committee for Transit shares concerns raised by members of the Council when it reviewed the Planning Board Work Program last month. The Planning Board and its staff face the task of crafting fundamental changes in our land use regulation system that are of crucial importance to the future of our county. The automobile-dependent system of segregated land uses that has created the present transportation mess must be replaced with a modern system that promotes urban mixed use and transit.

To that end, the resources of the Planning Board must be focused on the core elements of land-use regulation, the Zoning Ordinance and growth policy. Master Plan revisions around the Wheaton, White Flint, and Twinbrook Metro stations and in other urbanized centers must also move forward. Activities inconsistent with these priorities should be deferred. We therefore recommend that the Council address the budget as follows:

- Increase the allocation of funds and work years for revision of the Zoning Ordinance. A comprehensive revision is needed to correct the fundamental conceptual errors that were made when the ordinance was drafted many years ago.¹ As the negative consequences of our zoning rules have emerged, the county has responded not by repealing the bad laws that cause the damage, but by using Master Plans to undo the harm done by the Zoning Code. The overlay of these two clashing systems has created a mind-numbingly complex regulatory regime that continues to favor traffic-jam-creating sprawl development like strip malls and tract housing over livable mixed-use communities. Royce Hanson's initiative to revise the Zoning Ordinance needs a major commitment of the Board's attention and the staff's time.

- Fully fund the Annual Growth Policy. In the past, automobile-centric transportation tests in the APFO have promoted auto use and thereby contributed

to the traffic congestion that they are supposed to prevent. In the county's urbanized areas, an innovative transportation test is needed that takes into account all forms of mobility. We have suggested testing compliance with Master Plan targets for non-auto mode share; other options may emerge from research at the University of Minnesota on comprehensive indices of mobility. The Planning Board needs to have adequate staff time to identify a proper measure of mobility for the transportation test.

- Ensure follow-up to the Centers and Boulevards study. The concepts that emerged from these workshops provide a clear direction for future development and have gained wide community support. They should be systematically implemented in future AGPs and Master Plan amendments.

- Fund ongoing Master Plan amendments. These amendments will maintain the momentum of transit-oriented development that is the key to our county's future livability and economic health.

- Eliminate the proposed "Energy/Environment Master Plan" from the budget. Efficient transportation and land use should be the goal of the entire Master Plan and all elements of the Planning Board staff. It should not be the subject of a separate plan. Furthermore, the recommendations of the Centers and Boulevards study directly address more energy-efficient development; the Planning Board should implement them rather than begin a new study.

- Suspend the I-270 - 355 - Tech Corridor study. This study has lost its focus by lumping together transit-oriented and sprawl development areas. It should not be allowed to distract attention from the Planning Board's urgent priorities. After the necessary revisions in the fundamentals of the county's land-use regulation approach have been adopted, this study could be refocused and resumed.

We know the Council is working hard to develop better transportation and land use policies, and we look forward to continuing to support your efforts in that direction.

Sincerely,

Ben Ross

Vice President

cc: Royce Hanson, MNCPPC