



March 21, 2024


Artie Harris, Chair
and Members, Montgomery County Planning Board
2425 Reddie Drive
Wheaton, Maryland 20902

Dear Chair Harris and Members of the Montgomery County Planning Board:

My name is Dan Reed and I serve as the Regional Policy Director for [Greater Greater Washington](#), a nonprofit that works to advance racial, economic, and environmental justice in land use, transportation, and housing throughout Greater Washington. We would like to offer these thoughts in regards to Attainable Housing Strategies as the Board and staff craft their recommendations.

Greater Greater Washington [commissioned a poll](#), which we released last week, asking over 800 Maryland voters about our state's housing crisis and how local and state governments have responded to it. A few highlights:

- Montgomery County voters say housing is their #1 most important issue
- 88% of county voters say home prices have become less affordable
- 60% say there aren't enough housing opportunities for every budget
- 60% say local governments aren't doing enough to create more housing opportunities for every budget
- And most relevant to this effort: **80% of Montgomery County voters support allowing builders to build more homes of different styles and price ranges in different locations, and 58% support allowing townhomes, duplexes, and apartments in areas zoned for single-family homes.**

The Washington, DC region is great  and it can be greater.



These results align with [poll questions we asked 500 Montgomery County Democratic voters](#) in 2022, in which voters across all demographic groups expressed **strong support for allowing more types of homes even in their neighborhood**. These people aren't who you typically see speaking at the Planning Board, but their concerns, and their preferences for how local governments should address them, are evident. I'm here not to talk about why attainable housing is good, or why duplexes fit in well with single-family homes, but rather how **the public process we have for approving different types of homes in Montgomery County can better reflect what the public actually wants or needs**.

About a decade ago, my neighbors in Silver Spring were embroiled in a fight over a townhouse development called Chelsea Heights, which was to be built on the site of a former private school that was then zoned for single-family homes. Under the draft recommendations for Attainable Housing Strategies, this project probably could have been built by-right. Instead, there was a three-year fight, which carried through the Planning Board, the County Council, and the Board of Appeals.

Consider how many resources that consumed: thousands of dollars spent on lawyers (for both the developer and the neighbors), taxpayer dollars spent on a lengthy review and appeals process, and time and money spent by people who wanted to live in a townhome in downtown Silver Spring but had to wait longer, and ultimately pay more, for a home because of these delays. I can also speak from personal experience, as a resident of East Silver Spring, how difficult and painful these fights are, whether you support or oppose a given project.

Meanwhile, anyone can buy a little old house in my neighborhood, knock it down, and put up a much larger house, perhaps one the size of several townhomes, that sells for upward of \$1.3 million. There is no development review and no public hearing. The new house needs to pass inspection and get building and occupancy permits, of course. But no neighbor has to give permission for that house to be built.



There's nothing inherently bad, or good about single-family homes. And there's nothing wrong about people who move into a neighborhood and like it and would like things to stay the same. But these two processes do send a message about who this county values more—the people who prefer or can afford a detached house, and the people who have the time and the wherewithal to fight a development they don't like for years. **Those who don't have those resources get shunted to the back of the line, and may miss their opportunity to live here entirely.**

Today, we're seeing the limits of that approach to the planning process: double-digit increases in home prices over the past five years, and a lack of quality housing options for people who want to move here or stay here or build lives and families here.

Attainable Housing Strategies is an effort to change this. Over the next several months, we're going to have a countywide conversation about how to provide more types of homes, in more locations, for more budgets. It is better to do it here, and now, than on a project-by-project basis in which that larger goal gets lost amongst more parochial concerns. Ethically and morally, I also believe it is only right to put more types of homes, designed to accommodate more diverse needs and budgets reflecting the diversity of this county, on the same footing as a single-family house. Our organization looks forward to working with you and Planning staff to form recommendations on how to do that. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Dan Reed

Regional Policy Director