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MONTGOMERY COUNTY CIVIC FEDERATION TESTIMONY TO COUNTY COUNCIL
ON DRAFT REVISION OF THE HOUSING ELEMENT OF THE GENERAL PLAN

I am Jim Humphrey, testifying on behalf of the Montgomery County Civic Federation. At their meeting on November 9, Federation delegates unanimously approved the following position on the draft revision of the Housing Element of the General Plan:

"The Federation members believe that an important objective of the Housing Element should be the preservation of existing affordably priced housing, both government-controlled and free market available sale and rental units, while insuring units are maintained in good condition. This is a specific goal in the current Housing Element (Objective 4 - Strategy F, 1993 General Plan Refinement). Instead, a half-hearted recommendation to 'make affordable and workforce housing a priority' is buried as the 7th of 34 policy strategies in the document, with no specifics as to how this should be done. The most affordable housing units are those that already exist, since housing on redeveloped sites is almost always priced higher than that which currently exists. In addition, in environmental terms, existing housing has a smaller carbon footprint than redeveloped housing, regardless of how energy efficient that new housing may be.

"A second and equally important objective of the new Housing Element should be the preservation of the character and quality of life of existing neighborhoods. One of the six Objectives in the Housing chapter of 1993 General Plan Refinement is to protect existing residential neighborhoods, with 6 specific strategies identified to achieve that objective; but, all of these references have been removed in the proposed revision. We believe the objective of protecting single-family home neighborhoods, which occupy 72% of the developed land in the county, should be retained in any revision of the Housing Element. And we believe a new strategy should be added to the revision, recommending the creation and application of standards necessary to preserve the character of residential neighborhoods and insure the compatibility of infill projects with that character.

"MCCF delegates believe the proposed strategy to 'allow accessory apartments in residential zones by-right under appropriate design standards and conditions' [Strategy 2.1] is an attempt to circumvent a county policy debate that has yet to take place. The Federation strongly supports retention of the current Special Exception process for approval of accessory apartments."

On the reverse of this page, we have included the sections of the current Housing Goals chapter that we believe should be retained and strengthened in any revision you approve. Thank you.

Federation delegates believe the following Housing Objectives and Strategies, which are currently in effect in the 1993 General Plan Refinement, should be retained and strengthened in any revision of the Housing Element:

HOUSING OBJECTIVES & STRATEGIES from Housing Goals chapter currently in effect (1993 General Plan Refinement, approved by County Council in November 1993)

OBJECTIVE 4

Encourage an adequate supply of affordable housing throughout the County for those living or working in Montgomery County, especially for households at the median income and below.

Strategies

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F. Preserve existing affordable housing where possible.

OBJECTIVE 5

Maintain and enhance the quality and safety of housing and neighborhoods.

Strategies

A. Discourage deterioration of housing through well-funded code enforcement, neighborhood improvement programs, and other appropriate techniques.

B. Ensure that infill development and redevelopment complements existing housing and neighborhoods.

C. Mix housing with other uses with special care in ways that promote compatibility and concern for residents' needs for safety, privacy, and attractive surroundings when introducing new uses into older neighborhoods.

D. Provide for appropriate redevelopment of residential property when conditions warrant.

E. Protect residential neighborhoods by channeling through traffic away from residential streets and discouraging spill-over parking from non-residential areas.

F. Use special care to plan uses at the edges of high-density centers that are compatible with existing neighborhoods.