

MCCF Oral Testimony on Revisions to County General Plan Montgomery County Planning Board

November 19, 2020

Chairman Anderson and Planning Board Commissioners,

My name is Alan Bowser, and I'm the President of the Montgomery County Civic Federation (MCCF). The Association Members of the MCCF represent over 150,000 households from civic and homeowners associations across the County.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on the proposed Draft General Plan. We appreciate the work and time of the Planning Department on this document so far and we thank them for participating in some of our meetings during the last year.

While we understand that those working on the Plan feel that they have done much more outreach than usual, we think more is needed especially since residents are focused on many other things right now than the General Plan and these Draft recommendations were just released in October.

By comparison, the District of Columbia, which is 68 square miles compared to 500 square miles in Montgomery County, adopted a comprehensive rewrite of their General Plan in 2006 after many years of public engagement. In addition, they have spent the last four years working on amendments to that 2006 Plan with even more extensive engagement and hearings.

We've heard from members from Silver Spring to Burtonsville, from Clarksburg to Friendship Heights and communities in between. Some of these communities have submitted comments directly to you. Our members have been unanimous in their comments to us that this transformative Plan needs much more community input and discussion if it is to address the County's current and future needs and improve the quality of life for all.

At our September 14 meeting the MCCF adopted a Resolution calling on the Planning Board to extend the public engagement process in light of the current pandemic crisis.

MCCF strongly supports the idea of a community-based planning framework which values diversity and the need for a dynamic economic foundation. The social and economic disruptions of the current pandemic have raised serious concerns about the future of the national and regional economies and the unpredictable impacts on transportation needs, job creation, environmental stewardship and education and the implications of the global pandemic--and alternative economic scenarios-- must be

taken into account into any comprehensive planning framework adopted by the County.

The current announced timetable for the design, finalization, and approval of the proposed General Plan--without adequate public consultation and input--is unreasonable and unsuited for a legitimate community process in which residents can take ownership of the final Plan.

In order to continue planning for the future with confidence, accuracy, and sensitivity to the needs of the County's communities, the Planning Board should extend the public engagement process until after the current health crisis is over.

We appreciate the full consideration of these concerns.