



THE LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS

of Montgomery County, MD, Inc.

To: Montgomery County Council
For: Sept 13, 2016 hearing
By: Linna Barnes, president

Testimony on the 2016 Subdivision Staging Policy

Many important changes have been incorporated into the recommendations for the Subdivision Staging Policy in 2016. The League of Women Voters **supports** many of these changes for the following reasons:

- Transportation impact taxes will be focused on local areas where the impacts of development are most crucially felt. This will help provide solutions to current and future county transportation needs.
- New transportation tests will incorporate transit accessibility, biking and walkability and not just congestion of cars. By providing a more accurate method of testing, better results should be realized. Applying new tests of Vehicle Miles Traveled may provide a fairer method of measurement. LWVMC advocates for land use patterns that encourage more residents to walk, ride bikes, and take transit.

With continual focus on residents and not cars, we believe it will be a safer experience to be a pedestrian or biker, and more people will be encouraged to travel using alternative methods to cars.

- We suggest that parking provisions be reexamined to better suit the needs of residents. By unbundling parking from housing rates (e.g., price of a condominium or apartment), a more realistic fee will be established for parking. This cost may incentivize more residents to use transit, biking, or walking for their transportation needs and will acknowledge the high cost of parking and car ownership.
- Impact taxes in Enterprise Zones need to be based on a policy that helps the county to reevaluate current situations in a fair manner. Areas of the county develop at different rates and often need incentives to grow in a planned manner. With the incorporation of a method to evaluate and phase-in impact taxes in established Enterprise Zones, the resulting structure will provide development incentives when they are needed and also provide funds for needed infrastructure as soon as possible.

Turning to the ways in which the subdivision staging policy addresses **educational needs**, including prevention of overcrowding LWVMC first notes that predictions of student generation rates are both a science and an art. The subdivision staging policy is providing a framework to help balance students with facilities and needs. LWVMC applauds the effort to better coordinate student prediction rates between the Planning Department and Montgomery County Public Schools.



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We strongly support ensuring that services, such as schools, are made available as development proceeds, and we recognize that adequate facilities are essential to maintaining class sizes consistent with effective education. In view of ongoing growth in the Montgomery County Public Schools student population, it is important that tests for new development continue to include the adequacy of school facilities and that developers contribute toward the cost of new facilities.

We also note the following:

- Both new development and current stock housing affect the number of students, and this new policy outlines how school facility payments will be updated more regularly and with funds directed at local school communities. Since school construction costs vary by location and timing, an update to true costs is important. These new metrics that reflect the actual location of every MCPS student is a powerful tool.
- Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) have experienced an eight-year trend of enrollment growth of 2000-plus students a year. "...it is an ongoing challenge, primarily with classroom space." says Michael Durso, School Board president. Joel Gallihue, director of long-range planning for MCPS, attributes the rise in enrollment to birthrate trends and an influx of families. Enrollment has long outpaced funding for new construction as well as for expanding and improving existing schools. Thus, the school system has had to rely on more usage of portable classroom trailers and increasing class size. In addition, plans for expanding pre-school education and updating training for careers programs in the high schools, strains the budget and classroom capacity.
- As previously noted, although state school construction funding for growing school systems has been provided, it is not now, and is never likely to be, sufficient to meet these needs, and we cannot always depend on increasing property taxes on homeowners: consequently, it is necessary to generate other sources of funds. What could be more appropriate than tying our needs to the new development that is likely to increase the need for more classroom space?
- Whereas it takes four years or more from planning to finishing an addition to an existing school, let alone constructing a new school, it is incumbent to link funding for school facilities to plans for new development. Using some or all of the existing formulas, or developing a preferred "test," it is important that the collection of data and dispersal of information is ongoing and is current and easy to understand for developers as well as government agencies charged with administering the program.

In conclusion, of utmost importance is maintaining social equity within the county so all residents have access to jobs, employment, fair housing, and a quality education. Developing fair metrics that encourage these goals is crucial to an effective Subdivision Staging Policy.