



Irene Lane, *Mayor*
Barney Rush, *Vice Mayor*
Rich Brancato, *Treasurer*
Stephanie Martz, *Secretary*
Joy White, *Community Liaison*

**Testimony by the Town of Chevy Chase
Montgomery County Planning Board
Attainable Housing Strategies Initiative (AHSI)
March 21, 2024**

Chair Harris and Members of the Planning Board,

I appreciate the opportunity to address the attainable housing initiative today -- an effort that the Town of Chevy Chase supports in principle and, if implemented correctly, in practice. Given the importance of the issue, our Town Councilmembers have sought an open dialogue with residents to gather comments. The recommendations and questions provided in this testimony reflect our initial thoughts on the proposed AHSI recommendations. We look forward to receiving feedback to further inform our future testimony.

First, the Town of Chevy Chase is committed to fostering inclusivity within our community. We believe that our existing setback, height, and massing regulations will facilitate the development of multi-family housing in accordance with the County's plan while still providing for welcoming entryways, a vibrant tree canopy, effective stormwater management, and important emergency vehicle access. To garner support among our residents for the development of neighborly multi-family homes, the Town intends to consistently apply our municipal building code regulations to both single and multi-family housing developments.

The Planning staff has acknowledged this interest in confirming regulatory consistency. During its February 22 presentation, staff displayed several visuals that called for "more options, generally same character." These compelling images juxtaposed a modern teardown/rebuilt single-family home, permitted by right, next to an altered depiction showcasing a duplex with identical setbacks, height, and massing. Implicit in these images is the concept that multi-family housing will adhere to the same building envelope as currently allowed for single-family homes. For the attainable housing initiative to work, it must be undertaken in a manner that is adaptable to local building regulations. Again, this regulatory consistency would not hinder multi-family housing development.

Within this testimony, we outline two recommendations and pose six questions in Appendix A for your consideration during your upcoming work sessions. Simultaneously, we advocate for additional incentives to stimulate the development of highly desirable and more affordable residential housing within existing unoccupied or underoccupied commercial buildings so that this attainable housing initiative comprehensively addresses the housing shortage. These properties,

conveniently located near urban centers, already boast infrastructure that can support high-density housing.

Recommendation #1: Include a Pattern Book for Triplexes that Conforms to Local Building Codes in the Final Recommendations Report

Given that the Town's existing municipal building codes will be applied to multi-family housing, we believe there is widespread support for duplexes, and an opportunity to gain support for triplexes, within the Town. As we formulate our final position on the desired level of multi-family housing density to support, we request that the final recommendations report to the County Council include a proposed pattern book for triplexes and that all pattern books be developed based on conformance with local building requirements. Such a resource would enable our residents to visualize the appearance of triplex housing.

Recommendation #2: Determine Priority Housing Districts & AHOM Eligibility Through Minor Master Plan Amendments

County residents should play a vital role in the designation of Priority Housing Districts and AHOM along growth corridors. Leveraging residents' local knowledge can enhance the achievement of housing goals. Instead of imposing "one size fits all" policies, we advocate for a more nuanced approach. We propose that accommodating denser forms of construction be achieved through minor master plan amendments to different regions in the County.

A prime example of our concern with a "one size fits all" approach is the proposal for Priority Housing Districts. Under the proposal, these districts are defined as areas where quadplexes would be permitted by right within a specified distance of a rail station. However, this approach lacks consideration for neighborhoods with non-grid street layouts, narrow streets with limited on-street parking, and no current or planned BRT stops nearby. Also, there is also no compelling rationale for the stipulation of a one-mile radius. If the intent is to include areas from where residents might walk to a commercial center or transit stop, we encourage consideration of the views of other authorities. According to the Federal Highway Administration, "most people are willing to walk for five to ten minutes, or approximately ¼- to ½-mile to a transit stop." Moreover, both the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments and WMATA utilize a ½-mile walking route, not radius, for determining transit accessibility.

Similar concerns arise regarding the feasibility of AHOM along growth corridors. Specifically, the current recommended base density of 13 units per acre for R-60 lots seems inconsistent with the suggested density of 10 units per acre for larger R-90 lots even though some of these lots may be adjacent or across the street from each other. Moreover, a previous draft of the proposal document seemed to suggest that a few lots could be combined under AHOM, underscoring the need for further clarity regarding lot combinations and lot chaining.

The Planning Department has acknowledged that AHOM requires additional input from local communities and municipalities before implementation. Our recommendation of following a minor master plan amendment review for Priority Housing Districts is simply a further evolution of this principle. This approach would allow neighborhoods greater input on alternate and

additional centers of activity conducive to quadplex development. By engaging in deliberate and intentional decision-making, this approach would enable communities and municipalities to become partners in making more impactful attainable housing improvements.

We commend the diligent work of the Planning staff and express our gratitude for the Planning Board's thoughtful consideration of our comments.

Thank you.

Irene N. Lane, Mayor
Town of Chevy Chase

Appendix A: Questions for the Planning Department

1. Regarding the Local Housing Targets and Attainable Housing Strategies chart presented on February 21, why must Bethesda/Chevy Chase accommodate additional housing, despite already having 28 ongoing projects slated to deliver 6,978 units (including 942 MPDUs) in the next several years, which exceeds the target of 3,425 units? It is unclear why other transit-oriented areas like Wheaton, Silver Spring, and Takoma Park near Red and Purple Line stations appear to bear less housing burden. Could you provide insights into this apparent disparity?
2. How does the Planning Department intend to apply the pattern book to adaptive reuse projects, particularly considering the unique challenges posed by conversions and additions to existing structures, and what implications does this hold for small-scale developments?
3. Can the Planning Department provide clarity on the lot subdivision process for multi-family including whether ADUs can be constructed by right as a part of the multi-family development project?
4. Could the Planning Department provide illustrative examples of AHOM developments at various density levels within both the R-60 and R-90 zones, including the limit for lot combination or chaining?
5. As private equity investment becomes more prevalent in residential neighborhoods, should the County explore imposing restrictions on such ownership or implementing an excise tax specifically for multi-family properties owned by private equity investors? Currently, legislation has been introduced in the US Senate ([S3402](#)) and in California ([SB1212](#)) to address this concern.
6. Considering the emphasis on constructing more housing for purchase or long-term rental, should the County examine the prohibition of short-term rentals within new multi-family housing developments in residential neighborhoods?