

Action Committee for Transit

P.O. Box 7074, Silver Spring, MD 20907

June 26, 2005

Mr. Tom Perez
President, Montgomery County Council
100 Maryland Ave.
Rockville, MD 20850

Subject: Affordable housing near Metro - parking requirements

Dear Mr. Perez:

The legislation now under consideration to increase the supply of affordable housing near Metro stations should include repeal of parking requirements for affordable housing in Metro Station planning areas.

ACT has long advocated elimination of parking requirements for all housing near Metro. Our zoning rules now require anyone who pays for a housing unit to pay for a parking space. By forcing transit riders to pay for parking they don't need, the zoning ordinance creates a powerful disincentive to transit use and thus exacerbates our traffic problem.

De-linking the purchase of parking from the purchase of shelter is especially urgent for affordable housing. Because new parking near Metro stations is in garages or underground, a single parking space adds \$20,000 to \$30,000 to the cost of building an apartment. Eliminating this expense would go a long way toward improving the economic feasibility of affordable housing in these areas.

Affordable housing without parking can easily be sold or rented near any Montgomery County Metro station. In downtown Bethesda and Silver Spring, many tenants choose to live without cars even in market-rate housing. Attached are letters from two Montgomery County rental property managers who describe, from their own experience, the strong demand for housing near Metro with no parking.

Eliminating parking requirements near Metro would not significantly disadvantage people seeking affordable housing whose jobs require them to drive. Units not located near Metro will continue to be the majority of the county's affordable housing stock. What will change is that transit-accessible units will be chosen by those who can use transit, and units far from Metro will be chosen by the automobile-dependent, instead of everyone grabbing whatever becomes available first regardless of where it is located.

Housing built near Metro without parking will not have an adverse impact on surrounding neighborhoods, because essentially all single-family neighborhoods in the county that are near Metro stations already have permit parking.

Imagine if we had an ordinance, adopted in the 19th century to ensure everyone's access to good transportation, that required every housing unit to have a horse stable. Many of the county's horses would be stabled today in downtown Bethesda and Silver Spring. Instead, we have wisely allowed people to decide separately whether to buy shelter for a family and for a horse. Economic forces have led most horses to live in the upcounty, to the benefit of both humans and horses.

As we enter the 21st century, we have recognized that a transportation system in which everyone drives their own car is just as unworkable as one in which everyone rides their own horse. Yet we still require those who don't drive to have a parking space. Making everyone pay for a personal parking space makes no more sense in today's world than making everyone have their own horse stable.

Sincerely,

Ben Ross
President

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