

Smarter Growth Alliance For Howard County

January 19, 2021

The Honorable Howard County Council
George Howard Building
3430 Court House Drive
Ellicott City, MD 21043

RE: CB8-2021 – Reduction of Commercial Space Requirement in Mixed Use CAC Zone

Dear Council Members:

The Smarter Growth Alliance for Howard County (SGAHC) is an alliance of local and state organizations working together to foster healthy, equitable, and sustainable communities through smarter development and transportation decisions and improved protections for the county's natural, historic and cultural resources.

The SGAHC opposes CB8 as we believe it is premature to make such alterations while the County is actively in the process of updating the General Plan and making large changes in County land use planning.

There is certainly precedent to make adjustments to the percentages of required types of use in mixed-use zones to reflect shifts in market factors, but it is concerning that the justification for the changes proposed by CB8 is a developer-sourced market study and not a study from DPZ or another unbiased entity. There needs to be great care to not prioritize short-term project profits for the developer at the expense of general County land use supply needs.

Small businesses have faced unprecedented challenges in the face of the Covid-19 pandemic. There has been a reduction in the demand for commercial space in the face of the public health crisis, but that does not mean the demand may not shift soon, especially as vaccinations become more widespread and the state looks toward reopening. We know that Howard County is committed to helping assist small businesses as they look toward recovery, and passing CB8 could have the unintended consequence of raising commercial rental pricing for those businesses looking to reopen due to a supply that has been too vastly reduced. We should proceed with caution as it is very difficult to change a residential zoning back to commercial once altered.

The Smarter Growth Alliance for Howard County opposes CB8 because we believe that a change of such magnitude, that seeks to practically eliminate commercial space in a zone meant to incentivize that type of use, needs to be addressed and vetted through the upcoming review of the General Plan. Barring that, we request that the reduction in the total commercial space requirement is limited to 10% to prevent any unforeseen negative effects and that an independent economic measurement be conducted.

We thank you for your consideration of this important issue that could have long term consequences for Howard County.

Sincerely,

Howard County Citizen's Association
Stu Kohn
President

Safe Skies Maryland
Mark T. Southerland
Legislative Director

Howard County Sierra Club
Carolyn Parsa
Chair

Savage Community Association
Susan Garber
Board Chair

Preservation Maryland
Elly Cowan
Director of Advocacy

The People's Voice
Lisa M. Markovitz
President

cc: The Honorable Calvin Ball, County Executive