



MY TURN

By Lisa Markovitz

‘I can make 3 homes out of my one?’

Across Maryland, there is a great concern about the ever rising price of housing. Those making low to middle incomes have a hard time buying homes, or renting more affordably. The last county land planning guide, HoCo By Design, noted the need for more supply in areas of middle income and has goals of providing more.

At the state level, Gov. Wes Moore has had annual bills to address these issues. The latest House bill to pass last session required jurisdictions to provide "Accessory Dwelling Units" (ADUs) more easily. The Bill allows local restrictions for parking and other infrastructure needs. Part of a Howard County Zoning Regulation Amendment (ZRA) 218, includes compliance with the state bill, but also goes well beyond it and includes allowing duplexing and ADUs neither counting as increased homes per parcel.

ZRA218, which will soon become a County Council Bill with public hearing, allows ADU's across most residential zones, and also adds allowing a duplex in addition to an ADU on properties that now contain a single family home. ADUS are currently allowed, if they are attached to a home, often called "granny flats" that are rented to family members. Proposed changes include no restrictions on having the ADU a separate unit from the main home, which doesn't have to be owner-occupied.

Community concerns include the lack of restrictions leading to a large supply, which would further overcrowd County services such as schools, police, fire, stormwater management, traffic, etc. The age-old argument of trying to balance infrastructure needs with growth is upon us again, with affordability goals always in the debate. ADUS will be somewhat costly to construct, as would updating a single home to a duplex. In order to attain affordability goals, the right to do either, duplexing or adding an ADU, need to include that the parcel/homeowner live on site, having the main residence area occupied by an owner. Not requiring that would overly entice investors to convert single family parcels into three units with rents remaining at high rates. Even without the duplexing choice, the main residence being owner-occupied is a very important aspect, if affordable supply of rental units is going to be a real goal. After all, more

affordable purchase supply will not be helped here, given the higher value of properties able to triple density. At least the rental affordable goal should be a priority.

Even if owners occupy their properties and rent out units, having the ADU's and duplexing without any County control is a bad idea. New opportunities like this in zoning are done via uses by right, or conditional uses where the County can create criteria, and limit things where needed. The State Bill does allow for local jurisdictions to apply needed restrictions. Thus, these new provided options should be done via the conditional use process. Otherwise, the County will be giving up its right to have any control over where they will be done, how, or how many. If there are too many in one place, it could overwhelm resources. If there is no difference placed across neighborhood areas, then areas with difficult egress/ingress will see parking problems, emergency vehicle delays, and possibly even flooding concerns. Our County neighborhoods are not one size fits all. We might need more affordable units provided everywhere, but they cannot really be done the same way, safely, everywhere. The County needs to retain the ability to manage where they go and cover design applications, and criteria that could have a speedy process, but still retain the ability to maintain safe, productive planning.

Recently, the Planning Board recommended that the Council require owner-occupancy. Let the Council know how you feel about ZRA218 at Council Mail@howardcountymd.gov