



City of Bowie

15901 Excalibur Road
Bowie, Maryland 20716

November 18, 2013

The Honorable Andrea C. Harrison, Chair
Prince George's County Council
County Administration Building
14741 Governor Oden Bowie Drive
Upper Marlboro, Maryland 20772

RE: Preliminary General Plan (*Plan Prince George's 2035*)
Supplemental Public Hearing Comments

Dear Chair Harrison:

I provided testimony at the public hearing held on November 12, 2013. Due to the large crowd and imposition of the 3-minute speaker limit, I deliberately kept my comments as concise as possible. I would like to supplement my remarks on the General Plan's Implementation chapter, Plan Administration Policy 3.

In the Bowie City Council's letter of October 25 2013, the City Council recommends the following specific revision to Policy 3:

- 5. Under Implementation, Plan Administration Policy 3 should be revised to include the following specific strategy (as new S3.4):**

Establish enabling legislation that permits the elected municipal body to function in the role of the Planning Board for master plan preparation and development review within their jurisdiction, similar to the way in which the County Council serves in both legislative and administrative capacities.

You have heard the City and several of our fellow municipalities request, year after year, a greater role in land use administration within our corporate limits. The principle here is that decisions that affect our residents should be made at the most local government level, by those with a deep understanding of our businesses, property owners and residents. Some--albeit very limited--success in this area has been achieved in Annapolis. Due to the support and cooperation of Prince George's County, the City has gained some delegated authority for a number of perfunctory actions, like residential variances. However, what I would like to discuss in this letter is not what additional items the County should delegate but, rather, what type of new, significant role the municipalities of Prince George's County might have in assisting County government in implementation of the Countywide General Plan.

Letter to Chair Harrison re: Preliminary General Plan

The Maryland Legislature set up the current land use regime in the Regional District Act of 1927. I think everyone would agree that, within the past 86 years, the original purposes of coordination of urban sprawl from the District of Columbia and preservation of open space have largely been fulfilled. There is an opportunity for a new era of cooperation in responsible growth management that would offer to the elected officials of cities and towns in Prince George's County a direct hand in the planning and zoning process within their jurisdictions. **We suggest that enabling legislation be sought that will permit the elected municipal body to function in the role of the County Planning Board for master plan preparation and development review in their jurisdictions, similar to the way in which the County Council serves in both legislative and administrative capacities.**

The recommended approach will give each municipality in our County a seat at the table, should they desire it. This shared responsibility can also be put into practice in a myriad of ways. While some cities and towns may want maximum participation, others may want to participate only in the planning process for their community, but not in zoning decisions. Some cities and towns may want to hire their own staff, while others might be satisfied with Park and Planning providing staff services. Others may wish to maintain their current level of participation. In any event, the District Council would retain complete discretion and oversight regarding decisions made by cities or towns, as they do now regarding planning and zoning decisions made by the Planning Board. The rules and regulations will continue be what they currently are, under the Prince George's County Zoning Ordinance.

Before you dismiss this idea as being mildly quixotic, please consider this: If the 'powers that be' truly desire to make this change, it can happen, despite what laws have to be revised or amended. The concept of shared responsibility is a deep-rooted ethic within our democracy. The willingness of municipal leaders to participate directly in the planning and zoning decision making processes in their communities must not be undervalued.

As you begin to make some monumental decisions regarding the "Blueprint for Tomorrow" in the coming months, I ask you to remember the strong desire of many municipal leaders throughout the County to work cooperatively and to share a role in planning and zoning decision making in their jurisdictions. Please lend your support and endorsement to this pioneer effort to propel the land use system in our County into the 21st century, by including the recommended strategy in Plan Prince George's 2035.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide these supplemental public hearing comments.

Sincerely,

Joseph M. Meinert

Joseph M. Meinert, AICP
Director of Planning and
Economic Development

cc: Bowie City Council
 The Honorable Ingrid M. Turner
 The Honorable Derrick Leon Davis