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Dear Chairman Costello & Committee Members

I am a resident of Waltherson, a Waltherson Board member and CRP vice-chair (under the Lauraville URP) but am sending this as my personal perspective regarding Council Bill # 24-0544 Harford Road Overlay District.

Please excuse the lengthy testimony, made longer by the recent awareness of the rapid progression of the Bill.

Firstly, I am very concerned in learning about the unusual combined 2nd & 3rd Reader to be held at the 9/16 Council Meeting with the potential to be passed and enacted within 30 days. I only learned of this when meeting with Councilman Dorsey on 8/29/24 to request another extension of the URP, after which the CRP alerted the Greater Hamilton Lauraville Community Presidents & Leads, none of whom were aware of this timing.

Councilman Dorsey explained that he requested this expedited schedule so the Bill can be enacted before the Lauraville URP expires in October to preserve much of the URP restrictions and design requirements.

This is emphatically not the case. Very few URP Use restrictions are included and none of the sign and design requirements.

The October termination of the URP is **irrelevant** to this Bill, as the Councilman **no longer** supports the 2022 URP revision that would allow it to continue, that he has had for review & sponsorship for almost 2 years. My recent request for another extension was deemed unnecessary in view of the predicted passage of the Overlay Bill.

I respectfully question whether this abbreviated schedule: **6/10** introduction; **8/1** Planning Commission Meeting & this **9/10** Ways & Means meeting has allowed enough time for Departmental consideration. Housing and Community Development (DHCD); Dept. of Transportation (DOT) and Baltimore Development Corporation (BDC) do not appear to have given recommendations. Both agencies that worked with the Councilman on the Bill (Planning & the Law Dept) have provided recommendations, the BMZA deferred to the Planning Commission's recommendation.

Considering the impact this may have on DHCD-Zoning and Enforcement, as noted in the Planning Commission's **8/2** recommendation, as well as DOT, would not these agencies recommendations be important?

I am also concerned and surprised to discover on **9/5**, the Zoning Administration was **not** aware of the Bill.

Please know I am not in opposition to increasing density to promote business growth and understand the relationship between residential and commercial zoning is complex.

I fully support the growth and diversity in both the business corridor and the surrounding neighborhoods of the Greater Lauraville area, thanks in no small part to the work of HLMS and the community associations.. A pedestrian oriented living and shopping "village" is a present-day reality, though we realize we still have a way to go to realize our full potential & vision.

Come visit us on a 1st Friday, or at the Community Space at 4500 Harford Rd. to experience it.

Nevertheless, I strongly feel this is reaching the Ways & Means before the entire community has an awareness and/or full understanding of the Bill and knowledge of the process to its potential enactment. Most residents do not know where best to share their concerns other than to Councilman Dorsey. To my knowledge there was one lightly attended meeting on July 2nd to present the Bill to the greater communities and hundreds of residents impacted by it, and a prior notice describing the overview of the Bill in the May & June 3rd District Weekly's. To date I am only aware of the Councilman attending 2 meetings of the 10 impacted Community Associations for a presentation and Q&A's, both taking place after the Planning Commission meeting. Another example of how unfortunate the expedited timing: the difficulty of reaching the Councilman's constituents.

In discussion with community members, I find many of residents within the Harford Road Overlay area still unaware of the Bill, or do not have specifics other than an overview, and seemingly little understanding of the extent or ramifications of the zoning overlay change to residential properties. Many community associations & leads do not feel they have had enough time to adequately reach the many hundreds of households, nor should the responsibility be entirely theirs.

I do not agree that changing the zoning of the residential side streets perpendicular to Harford Rd. from single to multifamily will necessarily benefit the commercial corridor. This seems to be the majority opinion of residents and business owners.

In speaking with business owners, I have learned that the businesses in the Hamilton Lauraville Main Street would be better served by providing incentives and support that is badly needed and often available to other areas of Baltimore

City. This could include incentives for businesses to meet the changing demographics should the residential density be increased on Harford Rd.

In these conversations, I have found a shared awareness that if the multifamily development is poorly planned or executed, it can create negative perceptions of the area, deterring potential businesses, customers and residents.

I do agree wholeheartedly that the HLMS corridor will benefit from more residential units on Harford Road, which the zoning already permits. This also seems to be a unanimous agreement within the commercial and residential community.

Our Main Street currently has 2 large apartment complexes underway, 2 large single family homes becoming apartments and 2 existing purpose-built apartment buildings, and another just off Harford Rd, but within our URP boundaries. Unfortunately, these are not the norm, again because even though allowed by right, the corridor apparently lacks the badly needed incentives for development.

I do not agree that there can be an effective 3 mile cohesive “district” from Argonne Dr. to the County Line, and do not find much in the Bill to create this, Use Tables notwithstanding.

Once beyond the Hamilton-Lauraville business district there is little similarity between it & the rest of the Harford Road corridor. Unlike the HLMS Main Street, a cohesive walkable section comprising of contiguous street facing store fronts, detached & attached dwellings having both businesses and SF/Multi-family residences, this cohesion does not exist in the remainder of the corridor. It comprises of assorted large to small transit-oriented businesses punctuated with small areas of contiguous street facing storefronts and residential/mixed use that do not connect to others in the corridor, physically or as a “Main Street”.

I fail to understand why the proposed Zoning changes in this bill should so radically differ from other neighborhood corridors currently in Baltimore City as included in the proposed Comprehensive Plan Map.

Two nearby examples are Belair-Edison and Frankford corridors in adjacent Council District #2. They share many similarities to the Harford Road Corridor in both the residential and business areas.

In fact, Belair Rd. from Argonne/Parkside to the County Line not only has the same land uses of residential and commercial but has residential architecture indistinguishable from that on Harford Rd from Argonne Dr. to the County Line. However, this similar corridor continues to be low density on the proposed Comprehensive Plan Map.

I am only aware in the most minimal way of research and studies that determine the need for this Bill. The community has not been given any conducted by the City of Baltimore, other than repeated references to the 2008 Harford Road Corridor Study.

I feel adamantly that a decision by my City of this impact on our community should not be made without prior community engagement and a full understanding of why and how this will benefit our community & the others in this corridor. The Councilman’s presentation alone is not sufficient for me.

I do not feel this is the best 1st step to increasing neighborhood and business prosperity, and sincerely hope there will be continued support from my City for business and residential density on Harford Rd to other strategies.

If changes are made to permit multifamily units, contrary to the Councilman’s statements, Baltimore already has a quite robust system in place that potentially could be used for changing the use from SF to multi-family in R-1 through R-4 on a case by case basis, if permitted by CB rather than a blanket “by right”. Much of the BMZA work in 2023-24 is hearing requests for variances for multi-family. In all but a very few cases the decision has been favorable to the change.

Lastly, as with Councilman Dorsey’s Abundant Housing Bill (22-0285) there is no component for affordable housing requirements, only the expectation that more availability will lead to lower rental rates & lower the “overinflated” housing values in N.E. Baltimore . I question this approach.

As a tenant, my rent never decreased, as a homeowner, my greatest asset is my home.

After choosing to invest in this neighborhood, I am grateful my house has increased in value. I do not consider it “overinflated” and would be very loath to support a proposal that I’m told by its author will lower its value!

Thank you for the consideration of my perspective,

Susan Kessel