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LETTERS

Avoiding piecemeal zoning in Towson's downtown

The Greater Towson Committee is a nonprofit organization that promotes investment in Towson through development and revitalization of property and infrastructure for the benefit of the greater community.

Bill 41-16, which creates a new zoning classification to be known as the Downtown Towson ("DT") District, is a great concept but the legislation needs to be rewritten. It should be withdrawn and reintroduced.

The GTC has promoted Towson as an urban center and supported many initiatives to spur redevelopment in the core.

The current process of creating the DT District got legs when County Councilman David Marks sponsored Resolution 113-14 in November 2014. The resolution called for an end to piecemeal amendments to county zoning regulations, through legislation, which were necessary to accommodate the implementation of the goals of Master Plan 2020. Over the next year or so, the Department of Planning and the Planning Board recommended changes to existing provisions which would create a new zoning classification solely for the downtown area.

Make no mistake, the GTC fully supports creation of a zoning classification specifically for Towson. However, we feel that the regulations, which are applicable to the zoning classification, as it is presently written in Bill 41-16, do not provide the flexibility needed for urban development.

The whole point of creating the DT District is to do away with the rigid setback and height restrictions which currently apply in the core of Towson. In its current iteration, Bill 41-16 does not achieve this goal.

By way of example, and not by limitation, the bill references the height

and setback standards from the Towson Business Core Design Principles being required. The GTC feels as though the Towson Business Core Design Principles, which were created in 2011, could hinder redevelopment efforts in Towson if they are not modified as they were in part in 2015. The existing CT District regulations should not be repealed until after the County Council votes on 2016 Comprehensive Zoning Map Process issues Aug. 30. The GTC supports the utilization of the Design Review Panel to foster well-designed projects in the DT District through the use of its expertise in matters of architecture, landscape design and urban planning. However, the regulations regarding the DRP's review of development are in need of some revision.

The GTC supports many things about the bill. We support the elimination of the 45-foot height limit within 100 feet of the East Towson Community Conservation Area. We also support expanding the downtown area south of Towsontown Boulevard, the "Triangle." There is no area in Towson that would benefit more from the DT District overlay than the Triangle. Currently, the Triangle is dilapidated and does not adequately serve the community. The Triangle is included within the T-5 transect zone in the Master Plan 2020 and thus should be redeveloped to make a stronger, more vibrant downtown possible.

The GTC continues to promote planning efforts designed to strengthen compatible mixed-use, walkable development downtown Towson. Legislation which will create the DT District is absolutely needed. However, we would like to see changes made at this time so the piecemeal amendments to the zoning regulations through legislation can be avoided.

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