



OFFICES OF THE COUNTY EXECUTIVE

Marc Elrich
County Executive

April 10, 2020

Sidney Katz, President
Montgomery County Council
100 Maryland Avenue, 6th Floor
Rockville, Maryland 20850

Dear President Katz:

I would like to thank you and your colleagues on the Council for putting aside business as usual to prioritize COVID-19 emergency relief funding and the many other steps we must take to meet the unprecedented challenges we face. The well-being and lives of our residents require our full attention – these are the priorities of my office and of all the departments under my direction.

In framing these priorities, the Council has recognized the essential role of public hearings and testimony in the decision-making process. For the operating budget, your March 25, 2020 Memo to the Council proposed that “Since the public cannot attend operating budget public hearings, we will only have one public hearing and I have asked staff to determine how to accept and distribute testimony.”

For all other matters, the memo states that:

Where feasible we will delay public hearings on non-budget issues so that the public can more fully participate once the Council Office building is open to the public. ...[T]he Council will focus on only the most critical issues and it would be preferable to hold hearings closer to when an issue can be considered. [Emphasis added.]

Your recognition of the importance of maintaining our tradition of public involvement will no doubt be appreciated by residents who would like to remain involved but are preoccupied and beset by far more serious problems. I am writing to ask that the Council set the same priorities for the Planning Board’s work program. The Planning Board continues to meet, have substantive presentations, and take action on controversial matters important to the public. While its meetings are available on the website and the Planning Board has provided a form for public participation, the new process is complicated and subject to “technical difficulties,” as happened on Thursday, April 2nd. The result is little, if any, participation by a distracted public.

I would like to share a few recent examples that concern me. On March 26th, the Planning Board approved an amendment to the Ten Mile Creek Clarksburg East and West environmental overlay zones to be transmitted to the Council. Despite the critical importance of actions taken by a previous Council to protect the Ten Mile Creek watershed, there was no community or environmental participation in this agenda item. Also, the Planning Board continues to have substantive presentations on the Subdivision Staging Policy and ThriveMontgomery 2050 – planning documents that will have a major impact on the county’s future. Although there has been no public participation in any of these briefings, the Planning Board agenda for April 16th lists yet another briefing on the Vision and Goals for ThriveMontgomery 2050.

I ask that the Council give direction to the Planning Board consistent with its own decision to delay certain public hearings until such time as the public can more fully participate. Because sensitive environmental and major policy decisions require full public participation, I recommend that the Board limit its actions to those agenda items that are noncontroversial, necessary for the administrative functioning of the agency, and unrelated to major policy decisions that will come before the Council.

Thank you for your continuing efforts on behalf of all county residents.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Marc Elrich".

Marc Elrich
County Executive