

The Honorable Marc Elrich
Montgomery County Executive
101 Monroe Street
Rockville, MD 20850

RE: Funding the Office of the People's Counsel - FY 2023 Operating Budget

Dear County Executive Elrich:

On behalf of the Montgomery County Civic Federation, Inc. (MCCF) I am writing to request that funding be restored to the Office of the People's Counsel (OPC), an agency that is authorized by the County Code to represent the public interest in the County's land use regulatory process.

During the February 14, 2022 MCCF General Meeting, members voted to submit a letter recommending that this funding be restored in the upcoming Fiscal Year 2023 Operating Budget. Continuing to withhold funding for this agency is not in the public interest and defunding the OPC has led to an imbalance of representation on issues related to land use.

The Office serves to protect the public interest in land use hearings by promoting full and fair representation of relevant issues to achieve balanced administrative records. The Office also provides technical assistance to residents so that they can effectively participate in the County's land use control process. Reestablishing the OPC will help to restore a balance of trust and integrity to the planning and public engagement process.

Furthermore, the County Code requires that prior to introduction, any proposed Zoning Text Amendment (ZTA) be reviewed by a ZTA Advisory Group that includes the OPC. One of the reasons often cited by the Planning Department for the complete rewrite of the County's Zoning Ordinance (which was a seven year process) was to discourage the use of Zoning Text Amendments that bypass the master planning and land use public processes. However, since the Zoning Rewrite was adopted, there have been over 100 ZTAs proposed by a small number of Councilmembers. All of the ZTAs were proposed without the benefit of the OPC review.

Other Maryland jurisdictions have established People's Counsel including Prince George's County, Baltimore County and Harford County. It's time to restore Montgomery County's People's Counsel.

Thank you for this opportunity to submit our recommendation on this very important matter of public interest.

Sincerely,

Alan Bowser, President
Montgomery County Civic Federation, Inc.