

March 6, 2024

Written Testimony of Karen Zaniker
Swann Point Resident, Severna Park
Re: SB 1045

Dear Senator Gile,

I support SB 1045.

Since we made Severna Park our home in 1993, my family and I have experienced firsthand the detrimental effects of unchecked development on the residents and our community. In our current home since 2004, our property connects to the Koch Ivy Hill development down the street from Mt. Misery on Old County Road. This experience exposed us to the direct consequences of development: property damage, tens of thousands of dollars in home repairs and property restoration, diminished peace and privacy, and long-term adverse effects on property values, finances, and overall quality of life.

Despite dedicating countless hours over several years to voice our concerns and request consideration, our attempts to influence meaningful change as individual property owners and community members were thwarted. We faced opposition, notably from Koch and their legal team, which was adept at navigating and circumventing opposition, overcrowded schools, zoning, and environmental protections. Through regulatory loopholes, they optimized development for their benefit, often disregarding the well-being of its multiple adjacent neighborhood residents and the broader community. They appeared to have no intention or bounds to communicate, consider, come through on verbal commitments, or leave area residents equal to or better off than when they arrived.

Our efforts to collaborate with local community groups and county officials in search of mutually beneficial solutions were futile. For those of us lacking legal expertise or the financial means to afford prolonged legal representation, the possibility of effecting change seems out of reach. We, the residents and community members, are placed at a significant disadvantage in understanding and navigating the complex legal and regulatory landscape, further exacerbated by the behind-the-scenes dealings between developers, their legal teams, and local county relationships.

My participation in a public hearing against the Mt. Misery development highlighted the broader community concerns – environmental degradation, disregard for historical significance, property damage, financial impacts, and the overarching impact on our quality of life. In the case of Mt. Misery, this loud and opposing refrain of opposition was backed by local environmental and historical experts who provided data and evidence-based projections to demonstrate the inevitable outcomes. It did not matter.

I support SB 1045 and any initiative aimed at empowering county residents – particularly those directly affected – with a say in the county's approval process of developments that threaten to diminish our quality of life and community integrity.

Thank you, Senators Gile and Delegate Lehman, for championing this bill. I am in favor of Senate Bill 1045 and urge its passage by your colleagues and our representatives.