



7338 Baltimore Ave
Suite 102
College Park, MD 20740

Committee: Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs

Testimony on: HB980 – “Prince George’s County – Public Ethics – Definition of Application PG 416-21”

Position: Oppose

Hearing Date: April 1, 2021

The Maryland Sierra Club, in consultation with its Prince George’s County Group, urges an unfavorable report on HB980.

HB980 creates a significant and undesirable loophole in the ethics rules that govern land use decisions in Prince George’s County. Specifically, the bill would except from the current rules one of the county’s biggest and most far-reaching land use decisions, the approval of a countywide zoning amendment. To safeguard the integrity of the county’s land-use decision making process, we ask you to not endorse this weakening of the ethics rules.

The Sierra Club stands strong in support of good governance and high ethical standards for elected officials. The current ethics rules are meant to protect the integrity of the planning and zoning processes by restricting contributions from developers to county council members who are charged with making decisions about applications from those developers. Decisions about land use are crucial in our efforts to address systemic inequities and assure a sustainable future. They should be made in the long-term best interest of county residents, with full consideration of the importance of a healthy environment. Allowing decision makers to accept contributions from applicants undermines the integrity of the process.

The purpose of the county’s zoning rewrite process is to simplify the zoning ordinance and make it more user-friendly, fair, and transparent to improve implementation of the county’s General Plan. The forthcoming countywide zoning map amendment will affect every property in the county. It is essential that the approval process not be tainted by inappropriate contributions to decision makers.

Too often, carefully considered plans and guidance documents have been subject to amendments and exceptions that enable continued sprawl, increasing dependence on fossil fuel powered cars and whittling away the green infrastructure that sustains us all. We ask for an unfavorable report on HB980.

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Founded in 1892, the Sierra Club is America’s oldest and largest grassroots environmental organization. The Maryland Chapter has over 75,000 members and supporters, and the Sierra Club nationwide has over 800,000 members and nearly four million supporters.