



POSITION STATEMENT

Bill: HB 1064 Montgomery County Planning Board and Washington Suburban Sanitary Commission – Open Meetings – Live Streaming Requirement (MC/PG 101-25)

Position: SUPPORT

Date: April 1, 2025

Contact: Debra Borden, General Counsel

Jordan Baucum Colbert, Government Affairs Liaison

Dear Chair Brian Feldman,

The Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission (“M-NCPPC” or the “Commission”) has voted in support of HB 1064.

What this Bill Does. This bill alters the requirement that the Montgomery County Planning Board and the Washington Suburban Sanitary Commission, respectively, stream live video or audio of their open meetings to apply only to meetings held at certain locations. This bill was recently amended to add that a project site visit or educational field tour may not be considered a meeting pursuant to *Land Use § 20-202 (e)(2)* under paragraph 1, if no organizational business is conducted.

We support this Bill. *The Commission has worked closely with the sponsor on this bill and we support the proposed amendment.* At M-NCPPC, we provide inclusive and transparent engagement at the Planning Board, Planning Department, and Parks Department. The Montgomery County Planning Board follows all the requirements of the Maryland Open Meetings Act – which requires many State and local public bodies to hold their meetings in public, to give the public adequate notice of those meetings, and to allow the public to inspect meeting minutes. Compared to other public bodies, the Planning Board and WSSC have more stringent requirements, which currently are not efficient uses of resources.

The Land Use Article currently requires all Montgomery County Planning Board meetings to be livestreamed, which is not possible in certain circumstances when the Planning Board desires to have site

visits or in-person public hearings in affected communities. This is a unique open meetings requirement that does apply to most other public bodies.

Given the technical challenges with mobile streaming, the Planning Board and Planning and Parks departments currently must replicate master plan and parks tours three times so as not to create a quorum. This means six or more staff people for at least three to four hours each tour, numerous vehicle trips, coordination for access to specific sites, etc., to simply educate the Planning Board members about a master plan area or park facility.

This bill would allow educational tours to occur with the Planning Board without the live video streaming requirement. If this legislation passes, the tours would now be conducted as a full meeting of the Planning Board, subject to all other open meetings act requirements. Tours will be Planning Board will provide:

- i) notice of the tours;
- ii) the itinerary;
- iii) minutes.

These tours allow staff to provide geographical information so that board members are well informed. No business is transacted, no votes are taken; it is simply an opportunity for the Planning Board to be educated and for all members to receive the same information simultaneously. These tours are only for master plans and Parks matters and would not be related to any regulatory matters (subdivisions, site plans, etc.).

Additionally, this bill would allow the Montgomery County Planning Board to hold in-person public hearings in communities impacted by a master plan or project without needing to find a facility with the capacity to livestream. The current requirement leads us to hold most public hearings in our M-NCPPC Wheaton Headquarters rather than in locations that are more convenient to the community.

Commitment to transparency and equitable engagement. Montgomery Planning, Parks and the Planning Board are committed to equitable engagement. This includes removing barriers to participation and providing access and information in multiple platforms and methods to our community members. M-NCPPC has been a regional leader in live streaming events – we offer accessibility, translation, and other accommodations to allow people to participate in Montgomery County Planning Board meetings. Additionally, we offer virtual and call-in options for every Planning Board meeting. Our community members have come to expect a reliable and consistent live video streaming experience.

For these reasons, the Commission requests a favorable vote in support of HB 1064.