

DATE: March 11, 2025

BILL NO.: Senate Bill 970

TITLE: Howard County - Department of Planning and Zoning - Parking Space Requirements for New Construction Ho. Co. 13-25

COMMITTEE: Education, Energy, & the Environment

Letter of Support

Description of Bill:

Senate Bill 970 requires the Howard County Department of Planning and Zoning, when determining the minimum number of mandatory parking spaces for new constructions, to consider whether existing or planned pedestrian infrastructure could reduce the additional parking spaces needed.

Background and Analysis:

Constructing a mandatory minimum amount of parking spaces alongside new constructions is a common requirement by local jurisdictions throughout the country. A majority of Americans use a car as their primary mode of transportation, which is both accommodated and reinforced by development requirements such as these. While Howard County is similarly car-dependent, the county has recently adopted “Complete Street” frameworks and goals into its general plan that aims to reduce traffic and car usage by encouraging the use of public transit and pedestrian/bicycle infrastructure. Howard County also has well-established pedestrian infrastructure in place – especially in Columbia and surrounding areas – that the county will be able to build off to achieve their “complete streets” goals. Overall, this framework and current/planned infrastructure provides the county with the opportunity to forego additional parking requirements to meet their objectives.

Reducing the number of parking spaces required would also reduce land usage. Some restrictions on development are the small size of undeveloped parcels of land and environmental concerns, such as streams or flood lands located there or nearby. Not requiring the construction of additional parking spaces, or simply limiting the amount needed, allows for smaller developments to be constructed, accommodating the size of these parcels. In addition, by not having to build additional parking, environmental issues like rainwater runoff are reduced, and, with them, so is the risk of flooding.

Senate Bill 970 would allow Howard County to better determine what is feasible and appropriate for their development plans. In their latest general plan, the county laid out its conservation, smart growth, and complete street initiatives as major priorities for the years to come and these small changes to zoning and planning regulations will increase their ability to achieve these goals.

DHCD Position:

The Department of Housing and Community Development respectfully requests a **favorable** report on Senate Bill 970.