



TOWN OF UNIVERSITY PARK

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February 13, 2026

TOWN ADMINISTRATOR
Debi Sandlin

TO: The Honorable Senator Brian J. Feldman, Chair
and Members, Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
FROM: Laurie K. Morrissey, Mayor, Town of University Park
RE: Favorable with Amendments - Starter and Silver Homes Act: SB
36/HB 239

Dear Chair Feldman,

The University Park Development Overview Committee and I have carefully reviewed the bill proposed by Governor Moore, titled "The Starter and Silver Homes Act of 2026," SB 36/HB 239. We have many significant concerns that we wish to share with you.

We understand the important issue that the Governor seeks to address: the need for Maryland to increase the availability of moderately priced housing to attract and retain families and businesses and generate economic growth. We share these concerns. For reasons stated below, we do not believe that this bill is fit for its purpose and it could even cut against achieving the stated goals of incentivizing more housing at more moderate prices.

We also object to this bill because it virtually eliminates all authority granted to municipalities and counties to determine building regulations within their jurisdictions with respect to single family zoned properties.

Following are specific provisions of this bill that we find deeply concerning:

- Substantial reduction of building setbacks:
 - o Front and rear setbacks: Jurisdictions will be unable to require front or rear yard setbacks of more than 10 feet. Our municipalities and the County generally require minimum front setbacks of 25 feet or the established building line, whichever is greater. Rear setbacks are 20 feet or greater. The proposed setback reductions would allow for significantly greater impervious coverage, jeopardizing our ability to control storm water run-off on lots, which has become a major local government concern, and effectively permitting the removal of numerous canopy trees while not leaving enough space for new trees to grow. It would lead over time to neighborhoods appearing jagged, with new homes extending much closer to the streets than older homes. Such a result is not consistent with standard urban and suburban planning practice.
 - o Side setbacks. Jurisdictions would be unable to establish side setbacks of more than 5 feet, as compared to current County and municipal requirements of at least 7 or 8 feet. Our stricter standards provide the space needed for fire and rescue equipment and personnel and reduce the risk that fire will spread between homes, thereby enhancing the safety of our communities. Again, impervious coverage will increase and complicate storm water management.

Our concern regarding looser setbacks is compounded by the proposed elimination of standards that set lot area coverage limits.

- Permitting a row of three or more townhouses to be built by right. This sets a rigid one-size-fits-all model for “missing middle housing” that is inappropriate for most of the lots in our communities and does not consider the provision of infrastructure required for this level of density.
- Prohibiting regulations that “indirectly” violate the provisions of the bill. Such general language creates uncertainty as to what would be legitimate to regulate and invites contentious proceedings and possible litigation.

As a result of these provisions, the consequences of this bill are likely to counter the stated purpose of promoting more affordable housing, for the following reasons:

- Reduced setbacks and elimination of lot area coverage limits will encourage larger single-family homes. Developers would be entitled to take advantage of the expanded building area to build much larger single-family detached houses or to greatly enlarge existing housing. This will defeat the stated purpose of the bill, which was to encourage homes of moderate size and price. Rather than discourage “mansionization,” which was expressly the basis for enactment of HB 1232 (2006), the Starter and Silver Homes Act would actually encourage this trend without any counterbalancing public benefit. Such large homes would also decrease the opportunities for providing accessory dwelling units, a popular form of “missing middle” housing.
- Prohibiting regulations that “indirectly” violate the provisions of the bill creates uncertainty as to what is and is not allowed.

Further, we hope that in considering this bill, you and your colleagues will appreciate the core matter of policy consistency. All of you worked hard to secure the law that clarified our municipal authority, and we are concerned that this bill reverses the good results achieved last year. However, we want to work constructively to find means of addressing the demand for more housing in our State. We ask that you consider favorably the amendments to this bill that are proposed by MML. We look forward to consulting with you as the legislature reviews this bill and any proposed amendments during this session.

We look forward to collaborating with our neighboring municipalities and MML to develop the amendments that would accomplish the housing goals while also preserving municipal authority.

Thank you for considering our views.

Sincerely,

Laurie K. Morrissey

Laurie K. Morrissey, Mayor