

Jeff Zyontz
5 Monterra Court
Rockville, Maryland 20850

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To: Members of the Senate Committee on Education, Energy, and the Environment
From: Jeff Zyontz, Former Montgomery County Planning Board Chair
Subject: SB 1005

The Maryland Legislature had the wisdom to create the Maryland-National Park and Planning Commission 99 years ago. The Commission has served the residents of Montgomery County faithfully for all those years. It has been a nationally recognized leader in planning and park development. Those awards come from a dedicated, stable workforce with professional administration. Last-minute legislation to change administrative functions of such an agency is not justified.

The costs and complexities of SB 1005 are unknown. If there must be 2 contracts for the same IT software, it may cost more. Interesting, a County that wants to gain economies of scale may have costs imposed on it, if the other County's Board does not agree to the joint purchase. The complications of a single merit system and 2 independent Human Resource Offices is unknown.

I did not see any rationale for SB 1005 presented by the sponsors. Let me speculate as a distant observer. The budget constraints of TRIM (Tax Reform Initiative by Marylanders) have created a distorted incentive for Prince George's County. Since Park and Planning's budget is not limited by TRIM, there is an incentive to expand its budget as much as possible. Sometimes, there may be a legal objection to that expansion. Legal Counsel selected by a single County's Board, as proposed by SB 1005, may not raise any objection. Is that a sufficient reason to make a last-minute change?

The Montgomery County Planning Board was surprised by the Bill and objects to SB 1005's approval. Somehow, I am reminded of an old joke. Do you know how many psychiatrists it takes to change a light bulb. It only takes one...but the light bulb has to really really want to change. Without question, the Maryland legislature has the power to change the Commission....even without the Montgomery County Planning Board's consent. I hope the Senate Committee has the wisdom to reject SB 1005.