



**Office of the County Executive
STEUART PITTMAN**

June 28, 2019

Members of GAN,

Some of the leadership of Growth Action Network (GAN) have expressed concerns to me about the density allowances in the workforce housing bill that has a public hearing at Monday's county council meeting. I met with them on both Tuesday and Thursday of this past week.

Let me first say that the very existence of GAN is what convinced me that this county was ready for my candidacy. A network of community-based organizations united to take back control of land use planning from development interests, with a smart growth approach that limits development in most areas and drives it to redevelopment sites, is not only perfectly aligned with my views, but also a very powerful political force.

I need for GAN to be strong. I need you to support our forthcoming forest conservation legislation, our bill to limit campaign contributions from developers with applications pending, our strengthening of adequate public facilities legislation, our crackdown on erosion and sediment control violators, our bill making developers liable for stormwater management failures, our forthcoming impact fee increases, our budget allocations for new environmental inspectors and planners, and most importantly, for a General Development Plan that preserves the natural beauty of our land.

Like many of you, I am also concerned about the economics of housing. The new homes and developments over recent years have largely been to accommodate the upper end of the market. Even the apartments are almost all luxury units outside of the affordability range for the working people who keep our economy strong.

One of the incentives that most counties provide to encourage production of affordable units is a density bonus. That bonus can be provided anywhere, or it can be limited.

Bill 54-19, our workforce housing bill, takes a cautious approach. In order for a developer to get a density bonus for a workforce housing development, 40% of units must be affordable for families at 100% of median income or below and the other 60% must be affordable for households at 60% or below. The bonus provides a density of up to 22 units per acre in areas zoned R-15, R-10, R-5, commercial, and light industrial districts - but only if the parcels are on a roadway classified as a collector road or higher, are in a Priority Funding Area, and have sewer and water access. They must also meet all environmental regulations and any school, road, and utility APFO thresholds.

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GAN leadership has expressed concern about the potential for the density bonus to be used in R-5 districts. The complaint that we have heard from developers is that the density bonus is not available in R-1 or R-2 districts.

You may remember that workforce housing with this density bonus was offered in R-5 districts from 2011 to 2015. For three years no developers took advantage of the opportunity, but in 2014 Enterprise Homes proposed building 84 workforce units on Ritchie Highway in Earleigh Heights. Councilman Grasso famously told potential residents that they hadn't earned the right to live in his community, and R5 was removed from the workforce housing law by a split county council in a 4-3 vote.

That divisive debate ushered in a period in our county when we were viewed by many as unwelcoming to diversity and inclusion. Our subsequent failure to address fair housing and workforce housing issues led to a September 24, 2018 letter from ACLU and others threatening legal action against Anne Arundel County.

I consider Bill 54-19 and the accompanying fair housing bill (55-19) to be a small but significant step in addressing a dramatic shortage of workforce housing for county residents. Projections from Arundel Community Development Services (ACDS) suggest that only a small handful of projects will take advantage of this density bonus, and that the restrictions on location will prevent any community from experiencing a negative impact.

If my vision for our GDP is realized, the bulk of our workforce housing will be built where we need redevelopment and have public transit. We must encourage a lifestyle that gets people off the roads.

When I met with GAN leaders, we discussed a range of options to improve the bill, including requesting that the County Council hold the bill to allow more time for public engagement. My staff has reviewed those options with the council members who worked together to draft the bill and found a willingness to listen and an eagerness to hear testimony on Monday night, but no commitments to either the hold or pursue any amendments.

My advice to you is to make your voices heard, and to also listen. I have attached a fact sheet on both the workforce housing and the fair housing bills. We have also worked with Kathy Koch, the head of ACDS to place an op-ed in The Capital, and we expect an article on the housing bills to be in Monday's edition of the paper.

GAN leadership pointed out that my outreach and collaboration on these bills was focused on advocates for affordable housing, but did not include advocates for smart land use. That was a mistake that I don't want to make again. I have asked GAN for a regular quarterly meeting so that we can get ahead of all forthcoming land use legislation and benefit from the wisdom of your members.

Please continue your advocacy, and work hard to hold all elected leaders accountable, including and especially me.

Sincerely,

Steuart L. Pittman

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