



SIERRA CLUB

MARYLAND CHAPTER

Southern Maryland Group

September 22, 2021

Re: Amendment to the 2016 Comprehensive Plan Concerning the Maryland Airport

Dear Board of County Commissioners of Charles County:

The Southern Maryland Sierra Club is submitting this document as written testimony to the Charles County Board of County Commissioners concerning the proposed amendment of the 2016 Comprehensive plan, particularly zoning changes around the Maryland Airport. Consider these comments to be officially submitted for the public record.

On behalf of the five thousand (5000) members and supporters of the Southern Maryland Sierra Club, we **stand in opposition** to this proposed amendment. We believe that our following explanation, along with the valuable testimony provided by other organizations to this Board, will adequately demonstrate the necessity of **Rejection of this Amendment**.

Undue Burden on Minority Communities

The area immediately surrounding the proposed airport rezoning is a residential and predominantly minority community. Rezoning and development of this area will increase the air and noise pollution from the airport and associated industry. This move is representative of what has been going on for decades, in which economically disadvantaged and minority communities are focal points for siting additional point sources of pollution that have detrimental effects on public health. This will further exacerbate existing health disparities such as asthma, COPD and lung cancer rates that have been effectively demonstrated as preexisting conditions that make minority populations more susceptible to severe health outcomes for respiratory issues. Charles County already has several point sources of air pollution including one of the oldest and dirtiest coal fired power plants in the country, and the health of the public will suffer from yet another pollution burden placed upon the people. Meanwhile trees in the conservation district allow for the filtration of the air and absorption of pollutants, providing a public health asset. By rezoning, this community would be subject to construction, traffic, noise and air pollution burdens upon their homes and places of business.

Lack of Evidence of Economic Benefit

The proposed rezoning area is currently a conservation district, and the immediately surrounding area is zoned for residential. Proponents have cited economic development being a reason for the need to rezone, however there has not been evidence of (1) a concrete plan for this to happen (2)



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examples of this type of rezoning in a conservation district adjacent to a residential area being a prime example of the kind of economic boons that proponents are claiming. Growth and economic development belong in the town centers. Additionally, alternatives that are in existing town centers have not been adequately explored. Repurposing vacant strip mall space or redeveloping dilapidated buildings or warehouses have been demonstrated as effective ways for local economies to achieve success, and keep the character of the region intact. Without evidence from comparable case studies, there is no proof that this development would provide economic benefit **to the local communities**. While some quick money may be made in land transfers, claims of lasting benefits lack substance. For these communities to truly benefit, they need lasting, systematic investment with citizen involvement and input, rather than the current transactional but ultimately fruitless development schemes.

Lasting Detriment to the Environment of the Region

Various commentary and testimonies have already detailed the ecological and economic significance of the 558 acres of land to be rezoned via this amendment. We won't retread arguments that have been so painstakingly researched and presented, but we present the Commission with some telling mathematics.

Industrial areas such as the type that would be allowed following this rezoning have an average impervious surface coverage of 55%. This means a potential of over 300 acres of impervious surface. There is no amount of manmade mitigation that can blunt the detrimental effect of 300 acres of impervious surface runoff on the local watershed. Degradation of waterway health and the ecological and economic benefits that come from healthy waterways is not a possibility but a certainty. This amendment does not merely endanger the local ecosystems, it condemns them.

Thank you for your time and consideration, and once again we urge you to **Reject the amendment to the 2016 Comprehensive Plan**.

Regards,

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