



## **POSITION STATEMENT**

**Bill:** MC/PG 104-23 Montgomery County – Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission Restructuring Task Force – Establishment

**Position:** Oppose

**Date:** December 15, 2022

**Contact:** Debra Borden, General Counsel  
Jordan Baucum Colbert, Government Affairs Liaison

**What the Bill Does:** This bill would establish a task force to study the feasibility of transferring the duties of Montgomery County Planning Board, the Planning Department, and the Parks Department to the Montgomery County government, which currently fall under The-Maryland National Capital Park and Planning Commission (the “Commission”). It also requires the task force to make recommendations on restructuring the Commission to no longer include Montgomery County.

**Why We Oppose:** The Commission opposes this bill because it presumes there is a problem at Park & Planning that requires a legislative fix. The Planning Department and Parks Department are both award-winning and highly productive departments that are nationally-recognized for their innovative practices in land use planning and parks management. Additionally, both departments are leaders in the state in advancing equitable planning, parks services, and community engagement to Montgomery County’s diverse residents. While the Commission acknowledges that continual improvement of our operations and governance are essential, the appropriate inquiry for change should not dismantle the Commission as a foregone conclusion. In fact, restructuring the Commission to no longer include Montgomery County would abolish the Commission entirely, and the study as currently outlined, is unlikely to produce useful data, would only create uncertainty among Commission employees, decrease employee productivity and increase high turnover rates amongst our workforce in a significantly challenging job market.

The Commission was established in 1927 to provide regional long-range planning and park acquisition and development. Since its formation, the Commission has become one of the most recognized leaders in land use planning, parks and recreation, achieving countless awards for innovation and stewardship. The Commission regularly evaluates its practices and is held responsible for its actions by elected officials in the counties it serves. The integrity of our mission to improve the well-being of over 2-million residents in both counties remains intact specifically because of the way the Commission is structured.

The common conclusions of multiple prior studies to dismantle M-NCPPC include: the upfront cost of any merger is very high in terms of funding and disruption, initially purported efficiencies and cost savings are not confirmed, and that the independent oversight of Parks & Planning has multiple benefits that have yielded impressive results for many decades.

We have serious concerns that the task force is no more than a battle over political power waged at the expense of Montgomery and Prince George's County residents who rely on the Commission's innovative community planning, collaborative development review, outstanding parks, and inclusive recreational programs, just to name a few. This battle may also come at the expense of the Commission's workforce and its retirees, due to serious impacts on our Employees Retirement Systems (ERS). It is not a battle that will be fought as a contest of competing ideas. As proposed by the bill, this battle will be waged by County Executive-aligned representatives as opposed to Council or Commission representatives.

**Most importantly**, the checks and balances inherent in the current structure of the Commission are effective as the Commission is held responsible for its actions by elected officials in the Counties we serve. Our bi-county Planning Board composition, public appointment and removal process gets the results Montgomery County residents deserve. Thus, the Commission continues to remain intact with integrity as it has done for nearly 100 years.