

MORE HOUSING N.O.W. (NEW OPTIONS FOR WORKERS) CLIMATE ASSESSMENTS

ZTA 25-02 WORKFORCE HOUSING – DEVELOPMENT STANDARDS ZTA 25-03 – EXPEDITED APPROVALS – COMMERCIAL TO RESIDENTIAL RECONSTRUCTION

Description

The More Housing N.O.W. (New Options for Workers) is a package of two zoning text amendments, a subdivision regulation amendment, a bill, and an investment in a Workforce Housing Opportunity Fund that together aim to create more housing opportunities that are affordable to the middle class. The goals include building more workforce housing, converting vacant commercial spaces into housing opportunities, and establishing new pathways to homeownership.

This report covers the climate assessments only for ZTA 25-02 and 25-03. The technical analysis and recommendations of the ZTAs will be before the Planning Board on March 6, 2025.

ZTA 25-02
ZTA 25-03

Completed: 02-21-25

MCPB

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2425 Reddie Drive

Floor 14

Wheaton, MD 20902

BB	Benjamin Berbert, Planner III, Countywide Planning and Policy Benjamin.Berbert@montgomeryplanning.org , 301-495-4644
MB	Mark Symborski, Planner III, Countywide Planning and Policy Mark.Symborski@montgomeryplanning.org , 301-495-4636
ymg	Lisa Govoni, Supervisor, Countywide Planning and Policy Lisa.Govoni@montgomeryplanning.org , 301-650-5624
DA	David Anspacher, Chief, Countywide Planning and Policy David.Anspacher@montgomeryplanning.org , 301-495-2191

ZTA SPONSORS

Lead Sponsors:
Councilmembers Friedson and Fani-Gonzalez

Cosponsors:
Council President Stewart, and
Councilmembers Luedtke, Balcombe, and
Sayles

INTRODUCTION DATE

February 4, 2025

COUNCIL PUBLIC HEARING DATE

March 11, 2025

REVIEW BASIS

Chapter 2-81D

Summary

- Climate assessments for ZTAs are due to the District Council at least 7 days prior to the District Council public hearing.
- The Climate Assessment for ZTA 25-02 Workforce Housing – Development Standards identified minor to moderate negative and positive impacts on greenhouse gas emissions and carbon sequestration, and both positive and negative impacts on community resilience and adaptive capacity.
- The Climate Assessment for ZTA 25-03 Expedited Approvals – Commercial to Residential Reconstruction identified mostly minor to moderate positive and negative impacts to greenhouse gas emissions, sequestration, resilience, and adaptive capacity.

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SECTION 1 – BACKGROUND – MORE HOUSING N.O.W.

More Housing N.O.W. (New Options for Workers) is a package of five different initiatives that were introduced by the District Council on February 4, 2025. Included in the More Housing N.O.W. package are two zoning text amendments (ZTA), one subdivision regulation amendment (SRA), one bill, and the creation of a new Workforce Housing Opportunity Fund. This package intends to stimulate the creation of more housing affordable to the middle class.

Typically, Planning Staff reviews climate assessments concurrently with zoning text amendments. However, climate assessments are due to the District Council “at least seven days prior to a public hearing”, while Planning Board comments on the ZTA are only due “before the District Council hearing”. In this case, due to the complexity of the More Housing N.O.W package, this staff report only summarizes the climate assessments for the two ZTAs which are due to the District Council first. The Planning Board will have the opportunity to review the full package of Planning Staff analysis and recommendations on Thursday, March 6, 2025. The Council’s public hearings are on Tuesday, March 11, 2025.

ZTA 25-02 WORKFORCE HOUSING – DEVELOPMENT STANDARDS

ZTA 25-02 (Attachment C) is intended to accelerate the construction of Workforce Housing through the creation of a new Optional Method Workforce Housing (OMWH) development. The OMWH would be available:

- for residential detached properties in the R-200, R-90, R-60 or R-40 zone,
- fronting a street classified as a Boulevard, Downtown Boulevard, Downtown Street, Town Center Boulevard, or Controlled Major Highway, with at least 3 total travel lanes wide and a master-planned right-of-way of 100 or more feet,
- with site plan approval.

The OMWH would allow additional building types into the residential detached zones including a new triplex building type, and the addition of apartment buildings that can meet the development standards. OMWH developments would need to provide 15% of units as Workforce Housing. The ZTA also updates the development standards tables of all the existing zones and methods of development within the zoning code that allow townhouses to also allow triplex buildings.

ZTA 25-03 EXPEDITED APPROVALS – COMMERCIAL TO RESIDENTIAL RECONSTRUCTION

ZTA 25-03 (Attachment D) directly addresses some of the challenges with converting underutilized commercial spaces into residential uses. Elements of the ZTA include:

- a new use “Commercial to Residential Reconstruction” which is any site with an existing multi-story commercial use that is at least 50% vacant that is being redeveloped as a residential use,
- removing any limitations on residential development in the NR and EOF zones and allowing commercial FAR to be converted into residential FAR
- streamlining the existing regulatory plans under Section 7.4. into a single new “Expedited Approval Plan”

SECTION 2 – CLIMATE ASSESSMENTS

Bill 3-22, passed by the County Council on July 12, 2022, requires the Planning Board to prepare a climate assessment for each zoning text amendment, master plan, and master plan amendment, effective March 1, 2023. Each climate assessment must include the potential positive or negative effects a ZTA may have on climate change (including greenhouse gas emissions) and on community resilience and adaptive capacity. The climate impact assessments for ZTA 25-02 and 25-03 are attached in Attachments A and B and discussed in more detail later in this report.

CLIMATE ASSESSMENT ZTA 25-02

The climate assessment for ZTA 25-02 (Attachment A) anticipates minor to moderate negative and positive impacts on greenhouse gas emissions and sequestration based on identified factors, and minor to significant negative and positive impacts on community resilience and adaptive capacity based on identified factors. The size and direction of the impacts are dependent on the ultimate number, type, size, density, and location of the new developments since there is substantial variability in where these projects may occur.

GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS AND CARBON SEQUESTRATION

The highest variability relates to transportation, as new development may create a local increase in vehicle miles traveled but could be a net decrease depending on the source and destination of trips. Similar variability exists around the potential use of transit, being largely dependent on existing bus networks.

Less variable factors include increased building embodied emissions, and land cover change resulting in less tree canopy and green area which are mostly negative. Drivers of the negative impacts are a likely increased building size, increased impervious surfaces, and construction activity associated with major renovation or reconstruction. Energy related impacts overall are slightly positive with better building efficiency with new construction, and reduced per-capita energy use common in more dense developments.

COMMUNITY RESILIENCE AND ADAPTIVE CAPACITY

The results for community resilience and adaptive capacity are also varied. Depending on the location and density of projects there is a potential exposure risk to flood and stormwater issues present in areas with older developments. Noise exposure is also a negative factor given the use's location along major transportation corridors. New developments will also likely result in a decrease in tree canopy and green area, raising exposure issues to heat as applicants maximize the development potential of a property. Depending on whether a project is done through a renovation or a complete reconstruction, new stormwater management techniques may or may not apply.

Positive increases in adaptive capacity are expected due to increasing the population with access to transportation options and increasing community connectivity.

RECOMMENDED AMENDMENTS

When considering amendments to the ZTA, Planning Staff looked for simple changes that would not have a major impact on the intent of the ZTA. One amendment to consider is to reduce the required on-site parking, which currently requires two spaces per dwelling. Reducing the parking requirement would reduce pressure on new impervious surfaces, which would increase green cover, potential areas for new plantings, and reduce flood hazards and stormwater runoff.

In addition to amendments to the ZTA, Planning Staff have identified amendments to other sections of the County Code that should be considered. The first is to Chapter 8 of the County Code, Section 8-29B, Control of water runoff on small lots. This section of code requires Detached House and Duplex buildings on lots smaller than 15,000 square feet provide safe conveyance or control for any increase in water runoff resulting from an increase in impervious surfaces. Development of Triplexes, Townhouses, or Apartments would not be covered in this provision. Planning Staff recommend expanding the types of buildings that are required to provide for safe conveyance and control on these small lot settings.

Planning Staff also encourage re-evaluating the standards for granting stormwater management waivers, which also corresponds with the Climate Action Plan Action A-13 which recommends banning stormwater waivers. Stormwater management and flood concerns are already a major concern especially in these older developed areas subject to ZTA 25-02 due to a lack of existing stormwater control, and adding additional impervious surfaces in these areas without appropriate mitigation could exacerbate these concerns.

Last, Planning Staff encourages reevaluating codes that may be hindering tree plantings that could mitigate for tree canopy loss during the redevelopment of small lots. This includes reexamining the minimum 400 square feet of open area required for mitigation of tree canopy loss (Chapter 55), and reexamining the tree spacing requirements for trees in the right-of-way that may be too widely spaced to create effective canopy coverage in more urban areas.

CLIMATE ASSESSMENT ZTA 25-03

The climate assessment for ZTA 25-03 (Attachment B) anticipates minor negative and positive impacts on greenhouse gas emissions and minor positive impacts on sequestration. It also anticipates minor to moderate negative and minor positive impacts on community resilience, and moderate positive impacts on adaptive capacity.

GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS AND CARBON SEQUESTRATION

Transportation impacts may be positive or negative, depending on the level of densification that may result in increased vehicle miles traveled. Most commercial to residential reconstruction is likely in more developed areas with transit access, which would be a positive. Impacts to embodied emissions may be positive or negative, depending on whether an applicant adaptively reuses an existing commercial space, or chooses to tear down and rebuild on the site. Energy related impacts are likely to be minor, with a possible increase in local energy consumption, but likely decreases in per capita energy usage typical of new construction and dense developments. Depending on the type of residential development (Townhome vs Apartment), land cover changes may create more green space and tree cover or may result in less green space and tree cover.

COMMUNITY RESILIENCE AND ADAPTIVE CAPACITY

Resilience impacts such as exposure to flood and heat hazards may be negative or positive, depending on the site location and the development type built. The application sites are anticipated to be larger providing opportunities for applicants to address concerns including stormwater and flood risk. Heat exposure and tree canopy coverage are both tied to building type, with Townhouse development likely to have more green area and locations for tree plantings and Apartment development more likely to have local increases in heat exposure. Adaptive capacity is likely to be slight to moderately positive with the increase in public open spaces, access to transportation opportunities, and a distribution of resources if these residential conversions are in otherwise mixed-use areas.

SECTION 3 – CONCLUSION

Planning Staff recommends the Planning Board transmit the climate assessment for 25-02 with the recommended amendments to on-site vehicle parking, conveyance of lot-to-lot runoff, stormwater waivers, and tree plantings, and to transmit the climate assessment for 25-03 without any additional amendments.

SECTION 4 – ATTACHMENTS

Attachment A: Climate Assessment ZTA 25-02

Attachment B: Climate Assessment ZTA 25-03

Attachment C: Introduction Packet ZTA 25-02

Attachment D: Introduction Packet ZTA 25-03