

November 19, 2020

Board of County Commissioners
Charles County, Maryland
200 Baltimore Street
La Plata, Maryland 20646
Attn: Mr. Reuben B. Collins, II, Esq., President

Re: Proposed Changes to §297-258 and the Adequate Public Facilities Manual
October 20, 2020 Public Hearing

Dear President Collins:

On behalf of the Maryland Building Industry Association (“MBIA”), I’m providing comments regarding the proposed changes to §297-258 and the Adequate Public Facilities (APF) Manual for the County Commissioner’s consideration.

The Comprehensive Plan serves as the policy guide and framework for growth and development in Charles County. There are numerous ordinances and manuals including the Adequate Public Facilities Manual that serve to implement the Comprehensive Plan. Chapter 4.0 of the Adequate Public Facilities Manual establishes the policy for determining the adequacy of schools and the allocation of capacity. The stated purpose of this chapter is to provide for the orderly expansion of public school facilities and at the same time manage the county's growth in a manner consistent with the goals and objectives of the comprehensive plan.

The current allocation process does not fulfill the Comprehensive Plan goal to support planned growth in designated growth areas. Each year a disproportionate number of allocations are available to projects located outside designated growth areas. The current allocation policy dictates the location, type and rate of growth in direct conflict with the Comprehensive Plan. In addition, there is no limit to the amount of time a project must wait for allocations creating uncertainty that constrains investment in the County and increases housing costs.

Although the proposed amendments to the APF Manual will improve the process, there are several key areas that should be amended to ensure the allocation policy further supports the goals and objectives of the Comprehensive Plan.

Section 4.0 III.C. should be revised to permit the sharing of available capacity between schools at the same level that are located within a 3 mile radius. Sharing capacity between schools in close proximity will encourage growth in designated growth areas. New students zoned to attend a school at capacity could be designated to attend a nearby school with capacity. The benefits of this proposal include facilitating the efficient use of existing capacity, balancing enrollments and reducing the need to redistrict existing students.

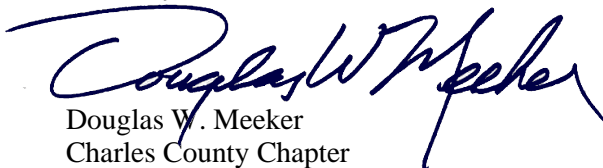
Section 4.0 VI. C. should be revised to ensure all allocations are available no later than 5 years from the date a project is placed on the allocation waiting list. Prior to being eligible for the allocation waiting list a typical project must secure various approvals which typically takes approximately 18 months. Once a project receives a sufficient number of allocations to justify proceeding with development, securing permits, site development and building construction will consume approximately 2 years before the first home is occupied. Students generated by a project are absorbed into the school system over a period of years dictated by the sales pace of the project. Based on historic sales data and the current student yield factor a typical single family detached home project in the Development District generates approximately 10 students per year and a typical townhome project generates approximately 15 students per year. A 5 year waiting period will provide the Board of Education and County Government a total of 8 ½ years to adjust for the first new students.

Section 4.0 VI. D. should be revised to ensure projects that have been on the allocation waiting list for at least 5 years receive all allocations upon adoption of this amendment. There are currently 19 projects totaling 755 lots that have been on the waiting list for more than 5 years, 9 of those projects have been on the waiting list for 10 or more years. Applying the current student yield factor those 755 lots will generate 343 students. Considering the current approval status of each project, its location, the product type and historic sales data those 343 students would be absorbed into the school system over a period of approximately 8 years. This timeline conservatively assumes every project proceeds immediately upon receipt of all allocations.

We believe our revisions to the proposed amendment will help prioritize development in designated growth areas, facilitate projects moving to completion in a more predictable timeframe, improve housing affordability and accelerate the County's receipt of increased tax revenue.

Our industry is keenly aware of the importance our homebuyers place on access to quality education opportunities for their children. Working cooperatively, all interested parties can ensure these amendments to the Adequate Public Facilities Manual will not have a negative impact on students, teachers or the school system.

Sincerely,



Douglas W. Meeker
Charles County Chapter
Maryland Building Industry Association