



PG/MC 112-24 SUPPORT

November 27, 2023

The Sierra Club Montgomery County Group SUPPORTS PG/MC 112-24 - MNCPPC Montgomery County People's Counsel for Land Use Planning.

This bill will establish and fund the Montgomery County People's Counsel for Land Use Planning.

Land use planning has a great impact on communities and the built environment but can be opaque and highly complicated. Private interests are often well represented by attorneys and experts. By establishing a People's Counsel for Land Use Planning, better and more equitable outcomes may result by ensuring that the public interest is represented and that ordinary citizens can better participate to create a full record.

Montgomery County is the largest jurisdiction in Maryland but is one of the only large jurisdictions that lacks this function. Baltimore County, Harford County, Howard County and Prince George's County all have had similar functions continuously for decades.

One example of a case in which a People's Counsel for Land Use Planning might have been helpful is the eight year battle¹ over Costco's proposed siting of a mega gas station in Wheaton. Ordinary citizens including the late Karen Cordy were able to expose errors in the developer's air quality calculations and ultimately defeat the proposal in 2018, but only at a great investment of time and money.

An [April 2023 Racial Equity and Social Justice analysis](#) by the County Council's Office of Legislative Oversight recommended that funding a similar office would improve equity in land use decisions.

For these reasons, we urge the Delegation to vote favorably on PG/MC 112-24.

Respectfully,

Darian Unger

Chair, Sierra Club Montgomery County Group Executive Committee

dwunger@howard.edu

¹[WTOP article about Costco Gas decision at Maryland Court of Special Appeals](#)