

## **NIMBYism is Self-Defeating**

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NIMBY means “Not In My Back Yard.” It can apply to almost any human endeavor one does not want near them. But, for the purposes of our discussion today, it applies to housing. You are a NIMBY if you push back against any kind of housing initiative in your local area no matter how much sense it might make.

There is no shortage of NIMBYism in Frederick County. For example:

No-growth candidates recently carried the day in Walkersville town elections. Here are some of their comments: “I don’t want to see any more townhouses built.” I don’t want to see any more houses built.” “We don’t need more houses.” And the most pithy: “I’d like to see people come in, spend their money, and leave.” Inexplicably, all this was in addition to comments that the city needs more funding to tackle existing projects, the very thing additional tax revenue from more homes would bring. The irony is hard to ignore.

There’s more: Mount Airy stopped a mixed-use development plan in its tracks due to traffic concerns. Brunswick’s city council sent back to its city staff a proposed zoning ordinance change that would have allowed old buildings to be used for housing. Thurmont residents voted in referendum to disallow annexation of 17 acres of county land to stop a high-density development. We could go on and on.

But reasonable people must ask themselves this: Is it worth it to prevent so many people from having a home of their own so I can have things just the way I want them?

Tired old expressions are used repeatedly: “This new development will change the character of my neighborhood.” “Our town will lose its identity.” “Our way of life is being threatened.”

We are not fooled. What this really means is “I like the way things are now and I’m not going to let anyone else come in and change that.” This is not only selfish but short-sighted.

Why should just the generation that benefitted from the wealth of this country – those like me who built their incomes with access to high-opportunity jobs and reasonable, in-balance housing costs – be able to live in the best neighborhoods, in the best municipalities and prevent others from doing the same?

We’re shooting ourselves in the foot when we push back on all growth. Research has shown that increasing access to affordable housing is the most cost-effective way to reduce childhood poverty and increase economic mobility in America. Children living in stable, affordable homes are much more likely to thrive in school and have greater opportunities to learn inside and outside the classroom and increase their earning potential.

The hard truth is we don’t have enough housing in the county to satisfy demand. That is irrefutable. Experts and politicians from both sides say the same thing.

Ask the 20- and 30-somethings around Frederick County about their housing prospects. You’ll get an earful. Many are starting families and would like to find a starter home, but can’t. We have let them down. Sure, it has always been tough on young families trying to buy that first home, but the housing situation is worse now than it has ever been.

Young people have few options. Millennials are now the largest generation in American history, outpacing the baby-boomers. They are

aging into their prime home-buying years with no homes to buy. In a recent survey, fully 55% of adults under age 30 say the lack of affordable housing is a major problem.

Add to the housing shortage the fact that we're all living longer and hoping to age in place. This causes the turnover of existing homes to slow as well. Many seniors would like to downsize to a smaller home, thereby opening up larger homes to young families, but there is nowhere to downsize to.

The new housing director for Frederick County, Vincent Rogers, sees the problem clearly. "What happens when your adult children want to stay in the area and be close to their families? What happens when you have an elderly parent who can't afford to stay in the home they are in now? I think it is critical for us to help people understand why increased housing is so important for our entire community."

There's nothing to be afraid of. In Frederick County and City (and even in the municipalities), new developments must pass a gauntlet of requirements before they are approved. Either the county or town can support a new development according to its capacity levels or the development must pay its own way. This includes water and sewer, schools, roads, parkland, forest conservation, and parking.

In the Ballenger Creek area of Frederick County (where Gary lives), we have lived it. The Orchard Park at Ballenger Run development in 2019 placed 210 affordable units into the market. He delivers medicine and meals to many of these good folks. Sure, traffic has increased and that took some getting used to, but additional lanes were added to Ballenger Creek Pike and that helped alleviate the problem.

School capacity increased temporarily, too. But the new development also paid for a new elementary school, a beautiful new 4-mile bike and walking path, and additional traffic lanes on Ballenger Creek Pike.

Was all this ideal? Of course not, but you must balance some inconveniences with the clear need for more people to have a home in Frederick County.

So, our plea to you is this: If we want to have a strong, vibrant community that does not stagnate because of the lack of affordable housing, and if we want children, young adults, and seniors to have a chance to live where they love, we must think twice before pushing back every single time a new development appears at our doorstep.