

Neighborhood Building Update - January, 2008

Renewing Montgomery is a communications initiative started by a group of independent neighborhood builders in Montgomery County, Maryland, to improve the dialogue among homeowners, neighbors, and homebuilders on issues relating to home construction and remodeling in established neighborhoods.

Updates on 3 key issues relating to neighborhood or "infill" building are provided below.

ISSUE: Lot Coverage

Current Situation: Regulations, in general, allow remodeled and new homes to cover up to 35% of lots in R-60 residential zones and 30% of lots in R-90 zones.

Potential Changes: Legislation is being contemplated that would reduce allowable lot coverage in R-60, R-90 and other zones. Any reduction in allowable lot coverage in a zone negatively impacts the value of all lots and homes in that zone by restricting the size of a home that can be remodeled or built on lots in the zone. If legislation is passed that reduces allowable lot coverage, owners of homes and lots in impacted zones can expect to find the value of their property reduced substantially. Even a 5% reduction in allowable lot coverage can mean eliminating a garage or living/dining area from a new home.

ISSUE: Tree Renewal

Current Situation: The number and size of trees in Montgomery County is greater today than ever. Most established County neighborhoods were at one time open farmland, and existing trees are the result of homeowners and homebuilders continually planting trees over time. An owner's right to plant, remove, and maintain trees as the owner sees fit dates back to Colonial times.

Potential Changes: Legislation is being contemplated that would require owners to request a specific County permit to remove individual trees on small lots and adjacent lots, with no guarantee that a permit will be granted. Owners could find they cannot sell their lot, expand their home, put in a patio or pool, etc., without the permit. Legislation on this issue is expected to be proposed very soon. Residents are encouraged to communicate their opinions on this issue to the County Council as soon as possible.

ISSUE: Economic Benefits of Neighborhood Building

Current Situation: Neighborhood or "infill" building continues to generate substantial economic benefits for Montgomery County, even in these challenging times. New residents bring new spending to area merchants, and new families help schools and places of worship thrive. Construction trades employ thousands of County residents, from laborers, carpenters, plumbers and electricians to cabinetmakers, builders and architects, all of whom pay taxes and are active participants in the County economy. Construction taxes and fees contribute to County revenues, funding services for residents.

Potential Changes: New regulations restricting or limiting neighborhood building are now being considered by the County Council that will adversely affect neighborhood building, placing the jobs of thousands of taxing paying workers at risk and impairing one of the most productive economic engines in the County.

The County Council is currently considering a variety of legislation that will likely have a significant impact on neighborhood building. In meetings with citizen associations, Renewing Montgomery often finds residents are unaware new legislation is being considered that will create new restrictions on their property rights and will likely have unintended consequences that are impossible to predict.

Renewing Montgomery encourages all County residents to participate in the legislative process by expressing their opinions and concerns to the County Council. An effective way to do this is to email Council members at county.council@montgomerycountymd.gov; emails sent to this address go all Council members. It is particularly important to provide input on legislation that is pending, not yet approved, or in draft form.

Please visit www.renewingmontgomery.com for more information.