

Homes for America

non-profit housing
development

Dana Johnson
President & CEO

Board of Directors

Trudy Parisa McFall
Chairman & Co-Founder

Michael Bodaken

Eric C. Brown

Dennis M. Conti

Charles L. Edson, Esq.

Mary Grace Folwell

Susan Frank

Chickie Grayson

James I. Humphrey, Jr.

Thomas Lantz

Richard L. Mostyn

Jeffrey Stern

Diane Yentel



318 Sixth Street
Annapolis, MD
21403

410-269-1222/tel
410-269-1479/fax

www.homesforamerica.org

November 4, 2020

County Executive John Olszewski, Jr.
400 Washington Avenue, Room 150
Towson, Maryland 21204

Councilman David Marks
400 Washington Avenue
Towson, Maryland 21204

Dear Sirs:

I am writing to express my concern about Bill No. 107-20 recently introduced by Councilman Marks. This bill proposes a building height limitation for the parcel that is the proposed site of Red Maple Place, a mixed-income apartment development on Joppa Road. The bill would effectively kill the development after two years of work by Homes for America in good faith.

As we have explained to Councilman Marks, Homes for America is not able to reduce the number of units in the building, so a reduction in the height of the building would prevent the development from moving forward. HFA has applied for and been awarded significant subsidies for the building through the Low Income Housing Tax Credit program and the Rental Housing Production Program from the Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development. These subsidies enable the building to serve residents of low and moderate incomes. These resources were applied for and awarded through a highly competitive process in which the MD DHCD scores the application based on a wide range of criteria including unit count and unit sizes. MD DHCD does not permit changes to these criteria after an award of subsidies is made.

Red Maple Place will be an asset to the Towson community and the County as a whole. Red Maple Place will be an attractive, well-managed apartment community with 56 units including one, two and three bedroom apartments. The apartments are designed with open floor plans and washer and dryers. Building amenities include a business center/computer lab, fitness center, and multiple indoor and outdoor gathering spaces. This community will be mixed-income including both market rate and affordable units. The building will be professionally managed and well maintained.

Homes for America (HFA) is a non-profit with a mission to build and preserve quality affordable housing enhanced with services. We have developed over 6,000 apartments across the region, and we are one of the most highly regarded non-profit housing organizations in the state of Maryland. We are committed to long-term ownership to ensure our properties are well cared for and maintain their affordability. We are also committed to providing affordable housing in areas where residents will have access to good schools and jobs. This location on Joppa Road will do just that.

Red Maple Place is a key development in support of the County's efforts to comply with the Voluntary Compliance Agreement (VCA) between the County and U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. Under the terms of the VCA, the County has goals of providing specified numbers of new affordable units for families over the period 2016-2027. Further, the VCA specifies the locations for these affordable units in order to ensure units are not concentrated in just a few areas of the County. Towson is one of the preferred locations for new affordable units. The County is already behind schedule in the development of the required number of affordable units, so further delay or derailment of

of Red Maple Place would be detrimental to the County.

Red Maple Place is a modest size building with just 4 stories and is much smaller than some of the other nearby buildings on Joppa Road. With just 56 apartments, the building is significantly lower density/unit count than the number permitted under the current zoning.

Homes for America has made significant, good faith efforts to respond to community concerns. HFA has been meeting regularly with community representatives since 2018. In response to concerns raised about the proximity of the building to the property line, HFA spent over \$300,000 in design and engineering fees to move and reorient the building on the site so it would be farther from the neighboring townhomes and would reduce environmental impacts. This change and the significant expense was made with reliance upon approval of legislation to permit the modified setbacks, which the Council unanimously approved in early 2020. In addition, in response to community feedback, HFA made changes to the color of the exterior of the building.

Overall, Homes for America has spent over two years and well in excess of \$1.5 million to develop the property with support from the County administration and council to date. The County Council approved the law change referenced above in early 2020 and denied a petition to change the zoning of the parcel in August 2020. This support has been critical to the development of the property and HFA's decision to continue to fund predevelopment expenses to complete the design and financing of the apartments. If Bill No. 107-20 is passed, HFA cannot simply walk away from this investment. We prefer to continue our strong partnership with the County and complete the construction of this important resource for County residents. However, if this bill is allowed to become law, HFA believes it is a potential violation of the Fair Housing Act and would pursue legal action.

I look forward to the opportunity to meet with you both and continue our partnership.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Dana Johnson', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Dana Johnson
President & CEO