



CLIMATE COALITION
Montgomery County, MD

RE: Office of the People's Counsel – Oppose Amendments to PG/MC 112-24

Julie Palakovich Carr, Chair
Emily Shetty, Vice Chair
Montgomery Delegation to the Maryland General Assembly
Annapolis, Maryland 21401
cc: Andrew Friedson, President Montgomery County Council and Councilmembers

March 5, 2024

via email

Dear Chair Palakovich Carr and Vice Chair Shetty,

The Climate Coalition Montgomery County supports citizen efforts to participate constructively in County land use and zoning decisions. So, we support the Office of the People's Counsel (OPC) fully retaining its mission, role and independence as codified in [County Code Article XII](#).

We oppose the proposed amendments to PG/MC 112-24, because they would remove the mission of the OPC to serve the public interest, eliminate the requirement that the People's Counsel be an attorney with zoning and land use experience, and prohibit the People's Counsel from participating in hearings, making it far less effective in helping citizens and community groups who need independent expert guidance when facing proposed zoning changes and other land use decisions. We ask you to support the original bill PG/MC 112-24 without amendments.

Wise land use decisions are fundamental to the success of Montgomery County's Climate Action Plan. The Office of the People's Counsel (OPC) was previously funded by the County Council and had a two-person staff between 1999 and 2008. The OPC, which enjoyed widespread positive support according to the 2008 report by the Office of Legislative Oversight (based on interviews with over 50 people who interacted with the OPC), participated in 267 land use proceedings from 2002-2007, and provided technical assistance in over 18,000 instances during that time-frame.

Climate disruption will accelerate in the coming years; it disproportionately affects low-income people and communities of color. When fully funded and staffed under its existing role and mission, the OPC provides the most effective way to support under-resourced communities' participation in land use, site plans and zoning decisions.

We request that you vote NO on the proposed amendments to PG/MC 112-24.

Thank you for considering our views.

Sincerely,

Diane Cameron, on behalf of the Climate Coalition Montgomery County