

Hillandale Citizens Association
Comments on Montgomery County Bill 25-16
“Neighborhood Action Team”

The Executive Committee of the Hillandale Citizens Association (HCA) supports Bill 25-16 to establish a countywide Neighborhood Action Team (NAT), which, at the request of a Regional Services Center, would bring focus to, and develop an action plan for, any specific community experiencing blight and declining “quality of life” in Montgomery County. However, we also ask that Council take this opportunity to help all neighborhoods by augmenting this legislation.

As an active association, we recognize that maintaining our community is essential. To that end, our residents look to County agencies, primarily, but not exclusively, the Department of Housing and Community Affairs (DHCA) and the Department of Permitting Services (DPS), for code enforcement to avoid potential blight and neighborhood decline. Unfortunately, sometimes enforcement falls short of full compliance, often takes too long and, at times, is ineffective. Occasionally problems are referred to other agencies without resolution, or between departments within agencies and never addressed. For residents experiencing these failures, the lack of a visible, positive outcome is frustrating and erodes confidence in the County’s ability to solve problems.

Although not part of the current NAT legislation, we ask Council augment this Bill with a new proactive “tool” for communities not experiencing large-scale blight to have improved code enforcement outcomes. This additional resource could either be through a request to the NAT, or with establishment of agency ombudsmen/trouble shooters directly available to residents. The goal is to have improved visibility and resolution to difficult cases not being addressed by normal code enforcement actions. This new process could also be a quality source of feedback on how specific agencies are doing and provide insight to any needed improvements in service request management.

We ask for your support of our idea to improve the Neighborhood Action Team legislation. Having a clear and resident-friendly method of resolving difficult neighborhood “quality of life” situations will help Montgomery County communities avoid decline and possible blighted properties.

Submitted by HCA
July 22, 2016