

Timestamp	First name	Last name	City	State	Zip Code	Remarks
2023-12-18 6:57:38	Kurt	Svensen	ARNOLD	MD	21012	See attached one-page written testimony

## December 18, 2023 County Council – Invitation to Audience

The purpose of my testimony is to once again express my concern that, despite “lip service” to the contrary, the process **leading up to** the introduction of comprehensive types of County legislation often lacks public engagement and transparency. Recent examples include:

- The Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU) legislation (council bill 6-23)
- The Schools Adequate Public Facilities (APF) legislation (council bill 52-23)
- The Essential Worker Housing Access Act legislation (council bill 78-23...under deliberation)
- The Transportation Adequate Public Facilities (APF) legislation (forthcoming...I “hear”)
- The Update to the Development Impact Fee Ordinance legislation (forthcoming...I “hear”)

These are just some recent examples of Bills that the sponsors themselves have described as “comprehensive” and which have purportedly undergone significant study and stake-holder engagement. Yet there is little to no transparency with respect to the study efforts undertaken or the data reviewed prior to the introduction of the legislation, or even afterward. Of course, there are “puff pieces” that tout the so-called community engagement process, and simplified visualizations slanted to support the conclusions embodied in proposed legislation.

Most often, the first chance for an Anne Arundel County citizen to gain any background information about upcoming legislation is at a Council work session... which, by the way, may or may not even happen (for example, there wasn’t one for the Schools APF legislation.

If a “working group” is formed to explore options and draft comprehensive legislation, **why** is the membership of that group, it’s meeting schedule and agendas, all data reviewed (subject to disclosure under the Public Information Act), and draft / final reports not routinely made publicly available?

**Why** are the many existing boards and commissions not asked to review and make recommendations pertaining to comprehensive legislation falling within their area of interest? For instance:

- **Why** does the Planning Advisory Board not review and make recommendations pertaining to a draft version of comprehensive legislation on the Adequacy of Public Facilities or Development Impact Fees?
- **Why** does the Housing Commission not do the same pertaining to legislation on housing?
- **Why** does the Spending Affordability Committee’s scope of work continue to be minimized?
  - Actually, as a retired and former AA County Assistant Budget Officer with over 20 years experience, and the former staff support to this Committee, I know why. It’s in the Administration’s own self-interest to minimize the degree to which business policies and procedures are exposed to such appointed citizens, let alone the general public...and, even you, the people’s elected representatives.

I hear this phrase often expressed by sponsors of this type of legislation: “Let’s not make perfection the enemy of the good.” That’s great political prose but I suggest it’s best interpreted as: “Good enough for government work.” As an Anne Arundel County citizen, I’m not asking for perfection...I’m making known what I think will be better government.

Sincerely,

Kurt Svendsen, Arnold, MD