

Testimony of Peg Mancuso
Montgomery County Resident & Real Estate Professional
ZTA 16-06, “Prohibited Signs—Signs in the Public Right-of-Way”
Position: Oppose
August 2, 2016

Council President Floreen and members of the County Council, my name is Peg Mancuso. While I am the current President of the Greater Capital Area Association of REALTORS®, today I am testifying as a Montgomery County resident, real estate professional and active member of my community. **Based on my experience managing a large residential real estate brokerage in the County, as well as civic and volunteer service, I strongly urge you to not move forward with a blanket ban on signs in the public right-of-way.**

From a real estate perspective, signs are an invaluable means of communicating with Montgomery County residents, both new and existing. The proposed sign ban would be a tremendous inconvenience to community members who are in need of directional information for short-term real estate related events, such as open houses. For those consumers not entirely familiar with a neighborhood or in newer developments, directional signs can often be more helpful than a traditional GPS.

Open-house signs have more than just directional value. They are also tied directly to home purchases of those folks who drove past the sign and decided to attend. In fact, real estate brokerages estimate the percentage of consumers who attend an open house based solely a directional sign was 35%. That number jumps up to 74% of consumers who buy a home within 6 months of attending an open house. **Bottom line – signs do matter.**

Further, the proposed wholesale ban will be a disadvantage to people who want to identify their property as being for sale and may not be able to place a visible sign on their own yard. Logistically, many homeowners don’t even know that certain parts of their property may technically be in the public right-of-way. This could make compliance extremely difficult for someone who tries to put a for-sale up near their sidewalk.

As a County resident, the ban will also make it extremely difficult to advertise community happenings such as yard sales, church fundraisers or seasonal festivals. Such groups which may not have resources for more main stream advertisement, and advertisement may not even be a viable option for something like a picnic. Personally, I can't think of the last time I attended a church auction that was not because I drove past a sign. I would be willing to venture that that percentage of attendance at such events is exponentially high based on signs. Since most of these signs are relatively simple and to the point, they have also never been a safety concern to anyone in my community who I've spoken to.

I do understand the County has very specific concerns of certain community member's overuse of signs, but the public has not been presented with any other evidence that similar instances are occurring regularly. There are already a number of existing regulations in place which, if enforced, should be able to eliminate or at least reduce any legitimate safety and aesthetic concerns.

Unfortunately, many residents are unaware of the exact permitting requirements. The County should instead increase education to boost compliance. Even still, most folks at the very least still do their due diligence to remove signs in a reasonable manner. Real estate agents, for example, as a best practice put signs up the evening before and remove them the day of the event. Since the existing permitting process can be very time-consuming and costly, County officials might also consider simplifying it through a more user-friendly online mechanism.

Overall, the balance of the public's benefit of allowing signs with fair rules and proper enforcement is significantly higher than banning them completely. Let's have a thoughtful discussion on developing a reasonable alternative. Thank you for the opportunity to speak before you today and I look forward to working on this issue following the hearing.