

Board of County Commissioners

**Commissioner Doug Howard
District 5**



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Commissioner Howard Statement on Freedom Plan

Westminster, MD, Wednesday, April 25, 2018

The recent completion of the Freedom Plan by the Planning Commission and much of the early discussion surrounding it leads me to share my perspective on the plan at this time. As the local government representative covering the vast majority of the Freedom area, I believe it is important to be clear where I stand on this very important issue.

First, I want to make it absolutely clear that I fully expect the Board to take action on the Freedom Plan. I have been very specific in my public statements, comments to staff and instructions to the Planning Commission to ensure sufficient time to get the plan done during this term. While we are certainly in the last year, we are not in the waning hours of the Board and there is a great deal of work, interaction, history and community input to get us to this point.

Many aspects of the plan are fine. Fine-tuning the maps to reflect what has already occurred on the ground makes sense. The addition of some modest amounts of commercial zoning and employment campus are also fine. The real questions come down to density and the pace of residential growth.

I fully recognize that the Freedom area is a "designated growth area", but there needs to be a balance between the more rural areas and the "growth areas" as we strive to maintain excellent quality of life for the entire county.

To justify residential growth in our area, decisions must meet three criteria:

1. There must be a demonstrated need
2. There must be appropriate infrastructure and resources
3. There must be adequate county support to offset the burdens of growth

In my opinion, this criteria has not been met and there should be NO significant increase of density or residential growth in the Freedom area with this plan.

CARROLL COUNTY

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At this time, there has not been a demonstrated need. There is ample supply of housing and housing options in our area. If there is a need for more affordable housing, it can best be achieved in parts of the county where average home prices are more modest. The plan will be reviewed again in about five years and this can all be reconsidered then.

Secondly, we do not have adequate resources. Most notably, there has been a tremendous absence of improvement to state roads 26 (Liberty) and 32 in the Eldersburg area. It is ironic that one of the vocal critics of this plan is an elected official whose job it was to solely represent this area to the state, and there has been very little progress during that time. There are also limitations on our sewer capacity and demands on other resources.

Finally, based on decisions being made even with this budget, there is not enough support from the county to mitigate rising water costs, provide for a full sheriff precinct or make other improvements that could support some of the burdens of growth put on this area.

Having not met these three criteria, I will not support significant or substantial growth in this plan and will work to have it modified before we consider its adoption. I will not support increased residential density for the Beatty, Gibson or Wolf properties. I want schools zoned as public use, as we will build communities around them. I will consider modest increases in density and efforts to generate some appropriately placed commercial or employment zones.

We should move forward with work to finalize Land Use Definitions so that when the plan is passed, zoning can be properly defined and implemented. I will also encourage my colleagues to instruct staff to begin looking at the designated growth areas for the county. As we prepare for the next county masterplan, we need to be sure that there is an effort to more appropriately disperse the growth that we do have. Then, after the election of 2022, the county should be ready to take the important work done on this Freedom Plan, reconsider the county and community needs, and move forward.

I look forward to hearty discussions with my colleagues, an energetic two-way dialogue with the community and the passage of the Freedom Plan in short order. For questions or concerns please email me at dhoward@cag.carr.org.

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