

Doug Howard
Commissioner
District 5



225 North Center Street
Westminster, Maryland 21157
410-386-2043; 1-888-302-8978
fax 410-386-2485
MD Relay 711/800-735-2258

Immediate Release:

Freedom Plan: Process, Politics and the Community

Westminster, Wednesday, June 7, 2017 - Since the beginning of my second term, I have been committed to seeing the Freedom Plan updated and approved during this four-year term. Proper planning for a community is essential. It has been far too many years since the plan has been updated and so much has changed in the Freedom area. Growth is one of the great challenges for any community. While some growth is necessary for a community to remain vibrant and viable, it must be carefully balanced against the needs for infrastructure and services to support growth and other potentially adverse effects of growing too quickly.

At the same time, we do know that growth will happen over a long period of time. Failing to plan and prepare for it can lead to even greater problems. We also know that the Freedom area was long neglected by decades of Westminster-centric boards of commissioners that left our area to deal with so many problems, brought on by poor planning, zoning special exceptions, and lack of infrastructure.

When the county was divided into districts, this was one of the primary reasons I choose to run for public office. The Freedom area needs a loud and strong voice to make sure its interests are heard and protected. We also need good, reliable, public processes that are designed to inform and engage citizens.

We should not allow a chosen few, elected officials or their cronies, that believe they know what's best for everyone to privately lobby, host living room meetings, harass county staff, and abuse other aspects of authority to get their way with no public process or a process of their own. If we have only traded smoke filled back rooms for suburban living rooms, right in the middle of the areas being discussed, we have just replaced one corrupt system for another.

The citizens across the county deserve better than that. We need processes that work and truly capture the public interest. I am confident in saying that this Freedom Plan process, even with some rocky steps along the way, was an open process. Issues were raised, options were vetted, and citizens were heard. In actuality, it is the fact that the remaining issues surrounding this plan have been so vetted, and so discussed, that I know citizens have participated and citizens have been heard.

As an elected official, ultimately tasked with voting on the plan, I was adamant about not weighing in on the plan until the public process was done. Despite the aggressive work of Commissioner

Rothschild and Delegate Krebs to create a narrative that simply is not true, I have kept to that commitment, and not offered my desired outcome. The Freedom Plan should reflect the needs, desires and vision of the community. It should not be the Doug Howard Plan. It should not be the Richard Rothschild Plan. It should not be the Susan Krebs plan. Unfortunately, not everyone takes that same approach. When certain elected officials concluded they might not get their way, they did the most cynical thing in politics. They attacked the process. Then they attacked the individuals tasked with the work, and it was shameful.

Knowing that we have tremendous input and that the hearing is tomorrow, I have decided to make clear what I have heard and my perspective on the plan for the Planning Commission and the community to consider.

First, I believe the process was an open, productive, and comprehensive process. It met all of the requirements and then some for such a process. For that, I commend our volunteer Planning Commission members for dedicating hundreds of hours to this process. I also commend county staff for their hard work supporting the effort, communicating, offering suggestions and doing it all while under public scrutiny and sometimes public attack.

Second, as the designated growth area in the county, with public water and sewer, it should be clear that there is going to be growth in our area. We also know that many have raised the issue about having more variety in housing and broader housing market that might accommodate young families and others in the community.

Third, I have never directed the Planning Commission, planning staff or any citizen to advocate for significantly greater density that would accelerate growth. In fact, even if the community was in favor of it, I believe it is premature to change the growth trajectory, of the Freedom area, until other issues can be addressed. It will only be 5-years after passage when we will be required to look back at the plan, and soon thereafter when it would be ready for its next revision. In that time, and before any substantial density increase is considered, we need to get some things done. Even then, it may not be the desired course for our community.

We have taken some important steps to prepare our community for some of the growth we know is coming

- I am proud that the last Board approved the transition to the Sheriff's office for law enforcement. I fought for more law enforcement presence with a location in South Carroll. Even with that, we are already working to get a more visible site.
- I am proud to have fought for the loan funds to reconstruct the Sykesville-Freedom District Fire Hall, something Commissioner Rothschild fought against, so they would have the facility and fundraising resources necessary to meet growing demands in our area. However, there is still more to be done.
- We've heard a lot about roads over the last few months. I agree that we need to relieve congestion. Unfortunately, the roads that most impact our area are state roads. Despite one of the greatest critics of the freedom process having been in office for 15 years as the sole state representative exclusively for our area, little improvement with

roads occurred. We do have great challenges, but I am hopeful that with a delegation led by Senator Ready and Delegate Shoemaker, a great relationship with Secretary of Transportation Pete K. Rahn, and strong communication with Gov. Hogan's office that we may see more improvement in the years ahead.

- During this interim time, I believe that we will see a settlement on Warfield and the housing options as part of that plan be centered around the growth of the town. As Warfield is now in a different district, I am hopeful that the partnership and leadership with Mayor Shaw and Senator Bates will take that long languishing project over the finish line, thus accommodating some of the growth demand.
- We need our state delegation to work to reverse the O'Malley tier legislation that restricts our residential growth on well and septic. With those unreasonable restrictions reversed, growth could be spread over more of the county, and not just dumped on Eldersburg or Freedom.
- My fellow Commissioners should also be committed to making sure that if the Freedom area is going to be burdened with growth, it also must be supported by infrastructure and resources, so that water rates don't skyrocket, and water/sewer is extended into other areas. Freedom should not be the dumping ground for growth.

Therefore, as I look at the plan:

- I am opposed to significantly greater density on residential parcels (such as the Gibson property). Some percentage increase may be reasonable, but not something that alters our overall growth trajectory.
- I am opposed to clustering. I believe it was a political stunt created by Commissioner Rothschild to get more density without looking like it, and now even he is opposed to it.
- I am in favor of the zoning for the Beatty property as the family has owned the property since before zoning was in place. The Planning Commission has made a nice compromise by creating a residential buffer.
- I am in favor of leaving the Monroe connection with the plan for an updated study, given that so much has changed, and roads are such an issue.
- Other land use designation changes, for the most part, seem reasonable, but there could be a few that need to be reconsidered. Keep in mind that the vast majority of the changes in this plan from the last, have been only to update the plan for changes that have already happened.
- Most importantly, I want a complete and comprehensive conversation with my colleagues before decisions are finalized.

I look forward to having these discussions with the Planning Commission as they complete their work and with my colleagues as we begin ours. Citizens have been heard. Processes have worked, and a dialogue continues.

As an aside, I do believe that by one person's actions, the relationship between Commissioners and the delegation has been strained. I will ask my colleagues to address this issue in hopes that the Delegation as a whole will affirm support for county processes.

Carroll County is a great place, we have great staff, we have great processes, and we have great citizens. The Freedom area is an important and unique area that must be protected from uncontrolled growth, project dumping and lack of resources. I have no individual designs on the outcomes, other than to be sure that the vision for the community is the community's vision.

I look forward to a timely completion of the process

Doug Howard

To View Commissioner Howard's Statement use the following link:

[Freedom Plan: Process, Politics and the Community](#)

###