

State of Maryland  
HOUSE ENVIRONMENTAL MATTERS COMMITTEE

Testimony in Support of  
HB 948 - Land Use - State Rail Station Overlay Districts  
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by

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I strongly support HB 948, the proposed State Rail Station Overlay Districts (SRSOD) legislation to be considered by the Maryland General Assembly. The laudable SRSOD goals, principles and implementation strategies would constructively supersede out-of-date, obstructive zoning concepts and regulations, justifiably replacing them with a much-needed, 21st century land use ordinance. Appropriately higher densities, diversified land uses and a well designed public realm could be developed in areas within walking distance of Maryland's urban, suburban and exurban rail stations. This would contribute greatly toward achieving smart, sustainable growth.

In 1989 planners and architects talked about "growth management" but subsequently embraced the broader concept of "smart growth," a term first coined in the State of Maryland. Smart growth implies wiser land use and infrastructure planning, multiple transportation modes, transit-oriented development, improved urban design, and more effective regulation of growth. It entails specific goals and principles that planners today universally advocate:

- Concentrating much new growth in existing communities to take advantage of existing infrastructure and other public facilities;
- Creating compact, dense, walkable neighborhoods with safe, rational street-block patterns and a strong sense of place;
- Mixing rather than segregating land uses, including housing and especially workforce housing;
- Providing a full range of travel choices - walking, biking and transit, as well as driving;
- Preserving historic buildings and, if feasible, saving and renovating obsolete buildings;
- Preserving agricultural land and sensitive environmental areas;
- Reducing water pollution by properly managing stormwater, natural watersheds and Maryland's streams, rivers, lakes and bays;
- Reducing carbon emissions and air pollution;
- Making the planning and development process predictable, fair and cost-effective;
- Ensuring citizen and stakeholder participation in the planning and development process.;
- Putting in place equitable, economically feasible methods for both public and private sector financing of infrastructure, public facilities and affordable housing.

The proposed SRSOD legislation clearly embodies these principles and would contribute to achieving Maryland's smart growth goals. Citizens inhabiting or working in denser, more coherent development centered on existing rail stations could leave cars at home and walk, ride bicycles, or use rail transit when they travel. Fewer cars on the road would reduce congestion, save energy and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Likewise, property damage, injuries and deaths resulting from traffic accidents, as well as first responder costs, would be reduced. And

the SRSOD legislation would serve as an antidote and environmentally sustainable alternative to costly sprawl that persistently threatens Maryland's valuable open space and parkland.

Maryland jurisdictions would prepare SRSOD plans to include urban and architectural design guidelines ensuring creation of aesthetically, functionally and economically desirable rail station district communities. In the interest of achieving a well designed public realm, the SRSOD legislation also calls for each jurisdiction to be responsible for and diligently undertake design review. Qualified, public sector planning officials and design professionals would evaluate the aesthetic, functional and technical quality of specific development proposals and building projects. Thus rational discussion, rigorous analysis and informed value judgments about urban design and architecture would determine what is built, not arbitrary, inflexible and often obsolete formulas and limitations typical of most zoning ordinances.

Finally, the SRSOD legislation wisely integrates cooperative planning with fair allocation of development and investment responsibilities. It envisions and enables a coordinated, non-adversarial process of collaboration between all concerned parties: state, county and municipal officials; public planning agencies; property owners and private developers; and individual citizens and civic organizations. Without such collaboration, innovative land use and redevelopment legislation, no matter how visionary, cannot succeed.

For all of the above reasons, I encourage adoption of the SRSOD legislation.

#### Biographical Note

A practicing architect and planner with degrees from MIT, Professor Emeritus Roger K. Lewis, FAIA, was a founding faculty member of the University of Maryland School of Architecture, where he taught design from 1968 to 2006 and helped launch UMCP's National Center for Smart Growth. He is a design and urban planning consultant to federal, state, county and municipal agencies, as well as private sector institutions, and co-authored the *Growth Management Handbook*. Since 1984, *The Washington Post* has published "Shaping the City," his thematic, bi-weekly column on architecture, planning and urban development.