

## OPINION - Local realtors oppose down-zoning

Posted by [TBN Editor](#) On 01/25/2017

### Letter to the Editor:

In the January 13 edition of the *Maryland Independent*, it was reported that a staggering 32 percent of Charles County residents are facing serious financial struggles by a study from the United Way.

"ALICE — Asset Limited Income Constrained Employed. According to the report, 25 percent of people in Charles County are ALICE, while 7 percent of Charles County residents are already living in poverty. ALICE is a United Way acronym which represents the growing number of individuals and families who are working, but still unable to afford the basic necessities of housing, food, child care, health care or transportation."

Thirty-two percent of Charles County residents—our neighbors, our friends, our families- struggling to put food on the table, to keep the lights on, one emergency bill away from poverty. Let me provide you a real number- that is almost 47,000 people, 1 out of every 3 people you see in and around your day to day life. Your child's friend at school, your co-worker you walk by every morning, the cashier at the grocery store and the senior citizen struggling to remain in her home. What's worse, Charles County scored not only just poor for housing affordability but LAST in the entire state of Maryland.

Three of the five hardest hit ALICE areas in Charles County are in the western part of the county. Ironic, given the extreme push by county commissioners Murphy, Robinson and Stewart to downzone 9,500 property owners in the same region into a financially devastating and unknown newly created watershed conservation district. What does this mean for Charles County residents? Increased real estate taxes for the 4th time since these Commissioners have taken office, decreased property values and as housing supply continues to spiral down with overreaching government policies on private property rights, such as the proposed 1 house per 20 acres for development, high demand will push affordability further out of reach for thousands. Imagine this report just a few years after this watershed zoning is approved. These are all questions the Southern Maryland Association of Realtors (SMAR), its 1500-plus members, and hundreds of residents over the last two public hearings of the Planning Commission have been asking county officials to answer. Why has the county not provided an independent financial impact analysis study when so many have asked for it, on the record? Visit [www.stopthecharlescountdownzoning.com](http://www.stopthecharlescountdownzoning.com) to ask this question for yourself.

Voting to approve this controversial watershed district will only push more people into poverty and more of our Charles County population into the ALICE category, it directly targets an already hard hit area, as the United Way study highlights. This is a human issue first before anything else, something no one else has spoken about, and we thank the United Way for their timely report. Most of the opposition agreed that returning to the original submitted plans from the February 8, 2016 hearing would satisfy all parties involved. Testimony from affected residents in a standing room only crowd ended statements to cheering applause, waving signs and a room full of emotional pride only we have in Charles County. The Henry family who bought land and have handed it down generation after generation after being freed from slavery will see their legacy end with this motion; the Smith family who bought land for their grandchildren now can't build a home but received the tax assessment two weeks ago with exponential increases for the next three years; and the countless others who have tended to their lands, paid their taxes and have raised the next generation of Charles County will now see their property go from their own, to conservation or as was well put, confiscation. As the ALICE article states, this hard hit region has already learned to rely on churches, charitable organizations and one another to get through each day. These are real people and not dollar signs, the opposition to this downzone is a community and we stand strong together.

The number of concerned residents at each hearing outnumbered those in favor of the district- 13 to 1 in November, and on January 9, out of 70 speakers, only 15 spoke in favor with two of those coming back the second night to say they had changed their mind. Not only do the numbers favor the opposition, the opposition are actual residents of Charles County. Those in favor of this downzone are being led by an out of county activist, with national groups pushing for large advocacy online campaigns. We urge the Commissioners to take into public record ONLY those with Charles County property addresses or business interests- we are the ones paying the bills at the end of the day.

Other groups like ours are playing fair. The Southern Maryland Association of Realtors posted a handful of updates to our local Facebook page with our 1,400 followers in Southern Maryland. We had a staggering 19,000 views on this issue alone in a matter of days- all from within this region. That tells us something pretty clearly—this community is alert, it has already come together and it is paying attention.

We know we will have the numbers on our side for Election Day 2018. The question is, will you commissioners Murphy, Robinson and Stewart?

**Lisa Van Tassel**  
**President of SMAR**

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