

Robert & Janice Vitale
St. Michaels, MD 21663

May 8, 2023

Town Commissioners
Town of St. Michaels, MD

Re: Proposed Ordinances 539; 542; 543

Dear Commissioners:

Prior travel commitments prevent us from attending the upcoming May 10 meeting relating to proposed Ordinance 539 (Formula Business Regulation); Ordinance 542 (Design Requirements); and Ordinance 543 (Fire Safety Access).

Unable to attend the meeting in person, we are writing in support of all three Ordinances, for the following reasons.

There is now a proposal before Town Agencies to approve the construction of a 73-room franchise hotel in the Gateway District. A project of this design, size and scale has not previously been pursued for development in the Gateway District. This project's proposed construction has brought into sharp focus the need (and Town residents' desire) for more thoughtful regulation of Gateway District development. For well over a year, Town residents have made clear their opposition to this project - through petitions with hundreds of signatures; through multiple and continuous appearances at various Commissioner, TAC and Planning Commission Meetings; through calls and letters to Commissioners and other Town Officials; and through in-person protests.

There has been no groundswell of support for this hotel project – no call for more jobs in a town already hard pressed for labor; no call for more transient housing; no call for more wage pressure; no call for more strangers across from an elementary school, day care center and community pool; no call for more room rate competition pressuring the Town's truly boutique bed & breakfasts; no call for more construction and traffic; and overall no call for cheaper, bigger, blander, samer.

The Town's Comprehensive Plan is clear – from its very first page - in its messaging to the Town's Commissioners, and I quote from Chapter 1, Page 1: "We are concerned about over-development within the Town, as well as **inappropriate development in the approaches to the Town.**".

Perhaps equally telling, when it comes to hotels, the Plan ruefully notes: "St. Michaels has in recent years become a favorite destination for bicyclists with many of the hotels and marinas providing rental equipment for their guests. **The end result is an increased conflict between vehicular and pedestrian traffic.**" (Chapter 6, page 2).

If enacted, proposed Ordinances 539 and 542 will provide Town agencies with an appropriate level of design review over projects – especially large-scale projects such as the proposed hotel – to insure compatibility with the spirit and letter of the Comprehensive Plan. Proposed Ordinance 543 would ensure large-scale projects incorporate appropriate fire safety measures. The review standards proposed by the draft Code amendments are typical of the standards applied by the BZA to other matters under its review and are therefore not unfamiliar to the BZA or arbitrary in content. There is no reason to think they will be arbitrary in application. Instead, uniform application will avoid a patchwork of commercial development with disparate buildings and architecture clashing with one another and destroying the Town's overall ambiance.

As Town Commissioners you have the privilege and burden of implementing the Comprehensive Plan and overseeing the Town's development in ways that will impact it for decades to come. Encouraging budget tourism is not helpful to the Town's economy and will most likely lead to a slow down-scaling of community life and economic activity. If our tourist and visitor base is built upon cheap hotel rooms, it will inevitably attract consumers who are unwilling to pay a little more for clothing, food, drink and recreation in St. Michaels. Our one-of-a kind shops will slowly dwindle, and low-cost budget franchises will take their place, or even worse, nothing at all. Downtown Easton is a good example of a town that allowed itself to fall into disrepair with boarded shops and shabby businesses and is now working hard to redevelop itself by promoting architecturally consistent rehabilitation of older buildings and a higher quality business base. We should not head in the opposite direction.

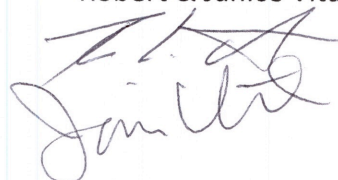
It's healthy for Town Officials to have different views on growth strategies for St. Michaels and to debate the same. But it's also critical that when Town residents speak loudly, clearly, consistently and directly to those same Town officials, their views are respected, and action taken accordingly. Town residents unambiguously want additional scrutiny and influence over development in the Gateway District. Denying them that right is to truly undermine representative democracy.

Town Administrations will change, but the very name of the Comprehensive Plan highlights its purpose in guiding each successive Administration in pursuing and protecting a uniform, global and consistent vision for the Town. That plainly articulated vision is to keep St. Michaels unique and special.

If you allow discordant development in the Gateway District, you will start the Town down a path it cannot recover from. Please, please listen to your constituents. Don't let St. Michaels become the Town that not only fooled the British, but also fooled itself.

Thank you and thank you for your service to the Town.

Robert & Janice Vitale

The image shows two handwritten signatures in black ink. The top signature is more stylized and appears to be 'R. Vitale'. The bottom signature is more legible and appears to be 'Janice Vitale'.