

Baltimore City Council

Hearing on the Report of the **Task Force on Inclusionary Zoning and Housing**

4 October 2006

Testimony of

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I am Father Richard Bozzelli. I am the pastor of Corpus Christi Church, a Roman Catholic parish that encompasses the neighborhoods of Bolton Hill and Reservoir Hill. I am here today to speak in favor of the recommendations of the Task Force on Inclusionary Zoning and Housing.

I am also a member of the steering committee of Beyond the Boundaries, a project of the Archdiocese of Baltimore, directed by Auxiliary Bishop Mitchell Rozanski. From its inception ten years ago, Beyond the Boundaries has addressed issues of race, poverty, housing, public safety, and education, as they affect the entire Baltimore Metropolitan Region. Inspired by David Rusk's seminal work *Baltimore Unbound*, Beyond the Boundaries has educated Catholics and has advocated for causes of social equity throughout the Archdiocese.

At the heart of the social equity cause is the issue of housing – for in the Baltimore region, where people live determines their opportunities for employment, education, and safety. Beyond the Boundaries supports a housing market with mixed-income neighborhoods, so that residents can live among people with diverse racial, economic, and educational backgrounds. We have supported other inclusionary housing initiatives in Howard and Anne Arundel Counties, and, today, I wish to leave you with a letter from Bishop Rozanski urging the City Council to enact the recommendations in the Task Force Report.

Throughout Baltimore City, new construction and rehabilitation of housing under current market and regulatory conditions are leading to an increasing supply of unaffordable homes. Unaffordable, not only to people of low income, but to people of middle incomes, as well. Unaffordable, not only to home owners, but to renters, too. Much of the affordable housing currently available in Baltimore City is substandard and does not provide a healthy environment for our residents. We support a comprehensive regulatory scheme that addresses this issue through changes in the zoning laws, tax structure, and availability of public subsidies. Strategies in each of these areas are outlined in the Task Force Report. We need to act on these recommendations to develop thriving communities for people at all income levels.

In Bolton Hill, for example, where housing values have nearly doubled in the six years I've been pastor there, adjustments in the tax code could make existing housing stock – which is in very good condition – affordable to a wider range of home owners and renters. In Reservoir Hill, where existing homes are in need of significant rehabilitation, changes in the zoning laws and the creation of public subsidies would go a long way not only to increase the availability of housing to new home owners and renters, but to allow existing residents to remain in the neighborhood in which they have lived for years. Maintaining a healthy mix of residents of varying economic means contributes to the quality of life in both neighborhoods, as seen, for example, in the success of Midtown Academy, a top-performing charter school that draws half of its students from Bolton Hill and the other half of its students from Reservoir Hill.

Critics of the Task Force recommendations will advocate a free-market approach to addressing the housing issue in Baltimore City. But no market is completely free. All markets operate within a regulatory structure that produces certain results. In the current regulatory structure, the market is producing housing that is out of the reach of the city's teachers, police officers, fire fighters, and retail workers. Change the regulatory structure, and the market will produce different housing.

Catholic Social Teaching asserts that the basic moral test of a society is not how well the rich and affluent fare within it, but how the most vulnerable among us are treated. If the dignity of the human person means anything, it means the ability to work, to learn, and to live in an environment that assures the basic necessities of food, clothing, and shelter, while offering opportunities to grow and to flourish in an atmosphere of love, hope, and joy.

On behalf of the Archdiocese of Baltimore's Beyond the Boundaries, I urge you to accept and to enact the recommendations of the Task Force on Inclusionary Zoning and Housing. Thank you.