

Written Statement of Opposition to Senate Bill 582

Prince George's County School Facilities Surcharge – Exemption

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Maryland Senate - Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee

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I write the committee today to voice my strong opposition to Senate Bill 582. I am deeply concerned that the bill will exacerbate the University of Maryland and the City of College Park's growing student housing shortage by removing a major incentive for private housing projects in the area. As the committee may know, the State of Maryland forced the university to cease the construction of on-campus housing when it eliminated the university's capacity to take on debt for student housing. This has become problematic, especially at a time when the university continues its transition from a commuter to a residential school. The university's on-campus waiting list continues to grow and the vacancy rate in the City of College Park (2.8%) remains well below the average in Prince George's county (4.5%) and nationwide¹. The problem is only compounded by an anti-rental mentality at the municipal level, which includes a rent control ordinance and owner-occupancy requirements on the vast majority of new construction. **SB 582 does not have the support of the University of Maryland student body** nor has any elected student government group ever been consulted during its drafting.

As the attached map indicates, the condensed boundaries proposed by this bill **radically limit** the geographic extent of the public school facilities impact fee exemption zone. Indeed, the new boundaries are so narrow as to almost completely remove the incentive altogether. They leave just two districts of private property eligible for the waiver (also indicated on the map). Both of these districts *would* be ideal locations for student housing. Unfortunately, they are unlikely to become student housing soon if ever:

a) Northgate area: This district is already almost completely filled out with proposals for luxury hotels and city-mandated owner occupied luxury condominiums. There is little to no room for more student housing and significant construction constraints because of a floodplain.

b) "Knox Box area": This district is undergoing property consolidation, but large-scale development is at least 10 years away if not more.

¹ University of Maryland – 2006 East Campus Development Initiative market study.
<http://www.eastcampus.umd.edu/Image/market/UM%20East%20Campus%20Market%20Analysis.pdf>

Proponents of this bill will insist that it is a well thought out “smart growth” strategy that encourages walking to campus. Yet, as I have just shown, this ideal is simply not possible. Also, numbers readily available from the university’s own shuttle bus service (university bus service is required when developers accept the fee waiver) indicate that the **existing boundaries are meeting and surpassing smart growth expectations**. For instance, the University Town Center project in Hyattsville was the first to benefit from the fee waiver and also happens to be located at the furthest possible distance allowed by the original 1.5 mile standard. Detailed bus ridership counts indicate that upwards of 90% of UMD students in the complex utilize the service during any given weekday. Incidentally, the only other project to benefit from the waiver thus far has been the University View, which is right adjacent to campus. Presumably 100% of students in this complex take the bus or walk to class. What could explain such a trend? Simply put: the costs of structured parking at a student’s residence, added to the university’s own parking permit system, makes bus patronage the cheapest and most attractive choice for traveling to and from campus.

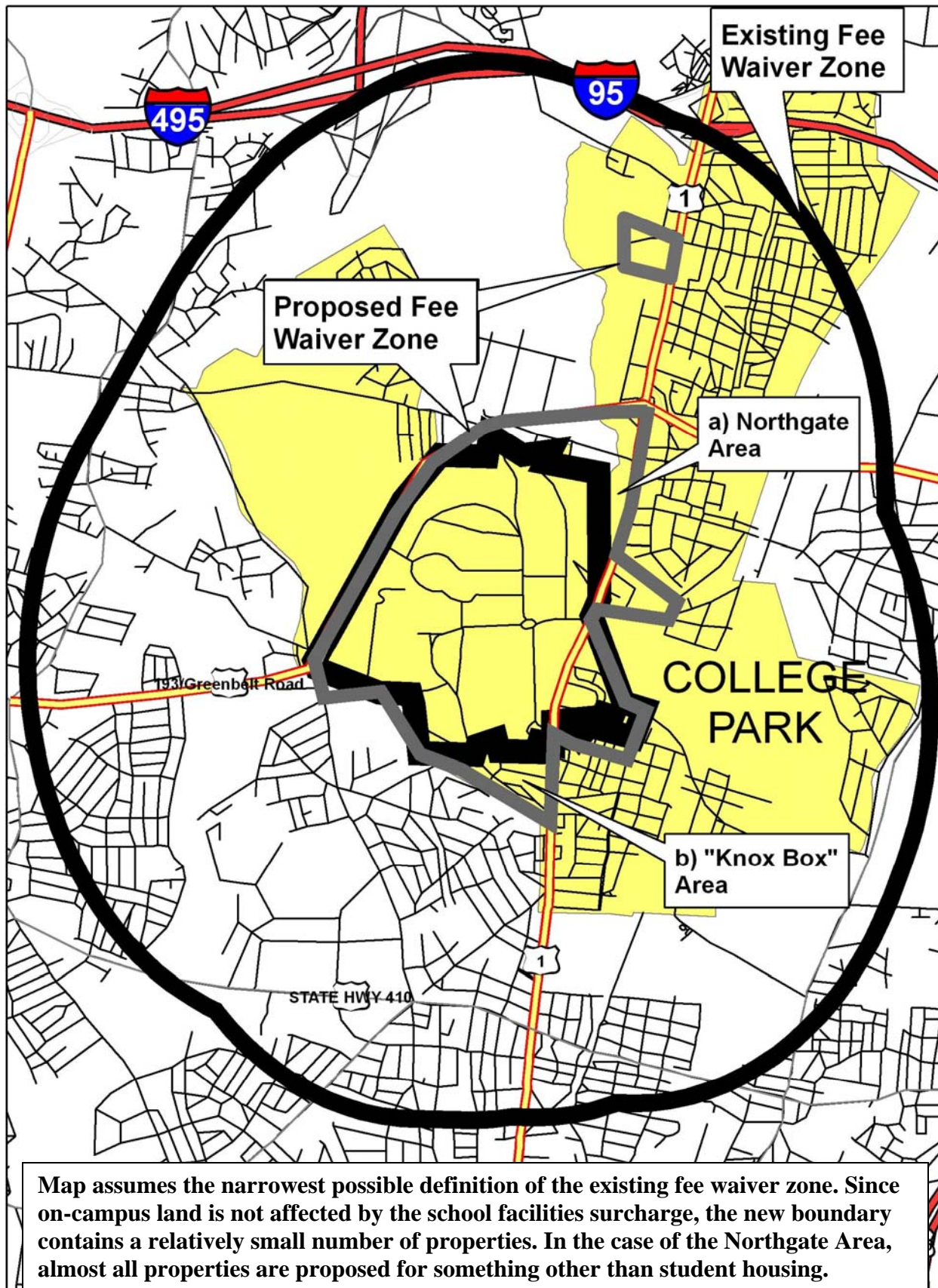
While I believe the College Park City Council and other proponents of SB 582 are well intentioned, I can’t emphasize enough that **this legislation rests firmly on the false and outdated notion that the land within the condensed boundary is readily available**. The bill’s proponents also mistakenly assume that projects distant from campus intensify local traffic when, in reality, they act to concentrate student apartments and facilitate more efficient transportation alternatives than the status quo.

I strongly urge the committee to wait for an amended version of this bill, which includes **meaningful input from University of Maryland students**, before proceeding any further. It would be a grave mistake to move forward without an adequate analysis of the alternatives at hand. Such an action could risk further intensifying the undergraduate and graduate student housing shortage at the state’s flagship university.

There is a clear incentive for all stakeholders to put this controversy to rest because the original 2002 legislation is decidedly vague about its definition of the “University of Maryland, College Park campus” (The map I have included is the most narrow possible definition of “campus” and the existing 1.5 mile exemption zone). There has also been significant concern from neighboring municipalities who would prefer not to be included in the zone. This fact does not preclude the committee from considering an amended version of this bill that expands the reach of the waiver zone to cover the entire Route 1 corridor in College Park, if not more. Short of lifting the State’s prohibition on university debt for student housing, the public school facilities impact fee exemption zone is the only support Annapolis can lend to students as they face a growing unavailability of housing in and around College Park and unresponsive leadership at the university, city, and county level.

I would like to see a comprehensive bill that:

- Provides long-term housing relief for University of Maryland students
- Includes the views of student stakeholders
- Respects the wishes of single-family homeowners and neighboring jurisdictions
- Adheres to the state’s smart growth principles
- Recognizes the unique urban planning opportunities and challenges of a college town

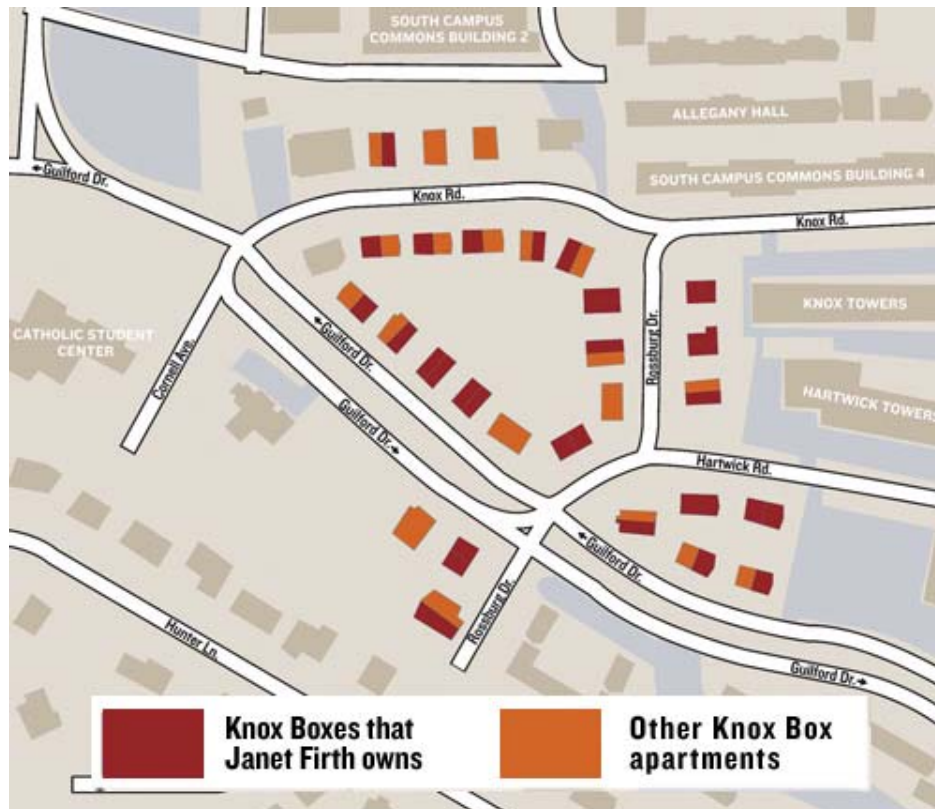


Map assumes the narrowest possible definition of the existing fee waiver zone. Since on-campus land is not affected by the school facilities surcharge, the new boundary contains a relatively small number of properties. In the case of the Northgate Area, almost all properties are proposed for something other than student housing.

**Approximate Number of Grad Students Living in University-Provided Housing:
University of Maryland and Five Peer Institutions**

Institution	Approx # of Students in University-Owned Housing ¹	Approx % of Grad Students in University-Owned Grad Housing ¹
Michigan	1,500	16.1
UCLA	1,509	12.4
UNC	335	3.5
Illinois	1,727	18.0
UMCP	636²	6.7
UC Berkeley	1,612 ³	17.3 ³

From: Housing Needs of Graduate Students at the University of Maryland, College Park: A First Assessment. 2003. Dr. Jim Cohen. http://www.gsg.umd.edu/student/grad_needs.pdf.



Knox Box area is far from property consolidation and development despite optimism from local politicians. Image courtesy of The Diamondback



17-Story Luxury “Northgate Condos” in the Northgate Area. Like several other project in the city, 75% of units must be owner-occupied as stipulated by the College Park City Council.