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Howard County Association of REALTORS®

To: Council Chair Jones and Honorable Members of the County Council

Date: January 20, 2026

RE: Support for Council Bill 3-2026, ZRA 218, Accessory Dwelling Units

My name is Tony Zowd. I serve as Chair of the Howard County Association of REALTORS® Legislative Committee. On behalf of our members and the homeowners and future homeowners we represent, I am here this evening to propose a few specific amendments to Bill 3-2026. As amended, we support the bill because it creates a clear, predictable framework for accessory dwelling units in Howard County.

From the homeowner perspective, ADUs meet real needs without changing the character of established neighborhoods. They help families care for aging parents, support adult children returning home, and create a modest rental option for teachers, first responders, and other local workers. They also help homeowners manage rising housing costs by adding a small, lawful unit on property they already own. As amended, the bill's core structure will further support those outcomes.

We encourage the Council to approve the bill with the amendments below. We believe that these amendments strengthen the bill, keep the review process clear, and reduce unnecessary costs. Additionally, we believe the amendments will expand homeowner access to ADUs while maintaining safeguards and neighborhood standards.

Recommended Amendments

1. Fix the size metric to match the Guide and state framing. Amend Section 128.0.A.13.E to: Replace “calculated based on the lot coverage of the principal dwelling” with “calculated based on the gross floor area of the principal dwelling.” Add the Guide’s clarification excluding loft or attic space used solely for storage because the bill’s “lot coverage” approach does not match the Guide’s “gross floor area” approach.
2. Remove or narrow owner-occupancy. Amend Section 128.0.A.13.a to strike the owner-occupancy requirement entirely. This aligns with the Guide’s recommendation.

3. Replace the 1-space parking mandate with a state-aligned approach. Amend Section 133.0.D.1.a (Accessory Dwelling Unit) to “0.0 spaces per accessory dwelling unit.” The current “1.0 per ADU” mandate conflicts with the Guide’s recommended baseline and does not show the study and waiver structure.
4. Add explicit “must address” compliance language. Add a new subsection in 128.0.A.13 stating: ADUs must meet public health, safety, and welfare standards, including applicable building codes and adequate public facilities provisions.
5. Add explicit growth-limitation exclusion. Add a sentence in 128.0.A.13 stating “An ADU does not count toward residential growth limitation measures”.
6. Remove the “existing detached structure” front-yard constraint. Amend 128.0.A.13.G to remove the limitation that only an ADU “within an existing detached structure” may be located in front of the principal dwelling, so long as it meets the district’s front setback.

A few more points to consider:

- Architectural similarity and HOA involvement: Requiring architectural “compatibility” with deference to HOA standards creates a de facto approval loop that invites discretionary rejection, added HOA review, and costly design demands—effectively giving HOAs veto power over ADUs and undermining state law and County zoning intent. This should be clarified to rely on objective, checklist-based standards rather than subjective design approval.
- Utilities and service connections: The current framework is unclear on utility connections and appears to default to routing ADU service through the primary dwelling, even when separate electric and plumbing hookups would be more cost-effective and less disruptive—especially on small or constrained lots. The ordinance and guidance should explicitly allow separate connections to avoid forcing homeowners into unnecessarily expensive configurations.



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- Building code alignment and electrification: Howard County’s all-electric new-build requirements and optional energy code appendices create a major feasibility issue for ADUs by treating small accessory units like full new residential construction, driving up costs through over-engineered standards and extensive testing. The County needs an ADU-specific code pathway—potentially incorporating tiny house standards for very small units—that scales requirements appropriately without compromising safety.

We respectfully ask for a “yes” vote on Council Bill 3-2026 with these proposed amendments, and perhaps others. Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully,

Tony Zowd
Chair, Legislative Committee
Howard County Association of REALTORS®