

Submitted in response to questions from The Washington Post:

Statement from County Executive Jack Johnson

“When you inquired about land transactions involving Prince George’s County over the last several years, I encouraged you to put your questions in writing. On May 27, 2008, you submitted 24 questions primarily related to housing and redevelopment initiatives since 2003. Your questions have numerous inaccuracies, and also presume active authority by me, as County Executive, in most, if not all transactions.

“Let me begin by saying that the basic premise of all your questions is flawed. Our government’s review shows that since December 2002, the Office of Central Services, the Housing Authority and the Redevelopment Authority have offered for sale dozens of properties. Nearly every project you have inquired about was administered by either the Redevelopment Authority or the Housing Authority. Each of these quasi-governmental agencies has a Board of Directors, some of which were appointed by me, but all of which are confirmed by the County Council. The members of the Housing Authority serve a defined term and can only be removed for neglect of duty or misconduct. Members of the Redevelopment Authority, who also serve for defined terms, can only be removed for cause.

“Consequently, they operate independently and these two authorities make all decisions related to transfer of properties they control. I have never spoken to or contacted the members of either of these authorities, directly or indirectly, to encourage or discourage them to take any action regarding projects or land dispositions. I have never spoken to members of these authorities or their staffs regarding any parcel advertised, transferred, or offered for sale. I am absolutely certain that no one could have truthfully represented anything to you or others to the contrary. I have never played any role directly or indirectly in any of these projects. Furthermore, I am personally unaware of any transactions involving these authorities that violated any rules, processes or procedures of the county charter or code, or laws of this state.

“It is my further understanding that multiple properties were advertised by these authorities as part of 11 separate and distinct projects. Proposals were invited from all interested parties and were evaluated by Proposal Analysis Groups or PAGs. I have no personal knowledge of who served on these PAGs. It is my understanding that all respondents’ proposals were evaluated under a set of established criteria and independent judgments were made. One criterion that was used, consistent with the policies of this Administration, was to ensure minority participation. This did not guarantee work for any individual or company, but it did provide opportunities for minority-owned companies to participate. It is my understanding that as a result of that criterion, joint proposals for development did occur and some were accepted. The Urban Land Institute, one of the foremost experts on urban development and redevelopment, recommends practices whereby less experienced entities should partner with more established companies to build the capacity of those capable of

doing such projects. This public policy objective is a philosophy that I share and I believe was evident in several proposals evaluated by the PAGs. Several of the successful bidders are examples of these partnerships.

“In addition, you also inquired about surplus properties that have been sold by the county over the past several years. Since 2004, 55 properties owned by the county have been publicly advertised for sale through the Office of Central Services. The process requires the County Council to approve the surplus of the land through legislation. These properties are separate and distinct from the dozens of parcels discussed above regarding the Redevelopment and Housing Authorities. The Office of Central Services follows established procedures set forth in our code for identifying properties to be surplus, and taking them through advertisement to sale. I have been advised that not all were bid upon, and 20 have actually gone to sale. Every sale to a for-profit entity was based on a fair market value appraisal, and has resulted in nearly \$3 million to the county. As you may recall, I committed to making land sales an essential component of assisting our hospital stay open by using the proceeds of those sales to provide grants to Prince George’s Hospital.

“While I have no direct knowledge of nearly every project you to which you refer in your letter, I am eager to see full disclosure. I am sure your readers and the residents of Prince George’s County would want and expect the same. I have asked staff to research these questions. We are disclosing all the information regardless of whether we are required to do so by the Maryland Public Information Act because I am certain that neither I, nor anyone working at my direction from my staff, exercised any influence over land decisions you inquired about. I want the truth to be publicly known. Specific answers are given for each and every question you posed. In the public interest of full disclosure, I expect that the Washington Post will print both my response here and the specific answers to each of your questions. Only through this process can we ensure that the entire public knows of both your insinuations and the truth about development and redevelopment in this county.

“One last point I will make is that during my review of these transactions, I wanted to ensure that we have a transparent process. Consequently, I have tasked my Chief Administrative Officer, Dr. Jacqueline Brown, to conduct an internal review of the processes used by all agencies or authorities for the disposition of publicly-owned land. I have further asked her to ensure that we develop processes whereby any parcel slated to be sold or transferred be evaluated as to whether it has substantial value, and that under no circumstance should any parcel transferred to a for-profit entity be done without a competitive bidding process through an RFP. She has begun this review, and I will take any necessary actions, including changes in procedures if warranted, to ensure the transparency and efficiency of all land transfers.”