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FAIRFAX COUNTY, Va. — A Virginia resident who recently began a home Bible study is expressing concern over a proposed zoning ordinance that he says may make such gatherings illegal.

Matthew Clark of Fairfax County recently wrote an article warning about the proposal, which he states is unnecessary and intrusive. The ordinance at issue pertains to large home gatherings that are held on a frequent basis, and limits such meetings to three times every 40 days, with a maximum of 49 attendees.

“These gatherings can create parking, noise and other concerns for the neighborhood,” the county writes in an explanation on its website.

“Although occasional, large gatherings—such as private parties, house concerts, religious meetings and social club—are expected and permissible activities at a home, gatherings that occur on a regular basis involving numerous people can detract from the residential nature of a neighborhood because most residential structures and neighborhoods are not designed to accommodate such events,” it said.

But Clark says that very few complaints have been lodged over the issue, and that there are better ways to handle the matter.

“Because six people complained, the county is poised to violate the right to free speech, the right to religious expression, and the right to freedom of assembly,” he wrote in a piece that was republished by the Christian legal organization American Center for Law and Justice (ACLJ).

“If they park illegally, tow the cars. If they cause a noise violation, issue them a warning or citation. If they litter, ticket them. If they trespass or damage property, arrest them,” Clark said. “But don’t violate my precious First Amendment rights to prevent something I’m not doing and can easily be remedied in any of the above ways.”

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