



## Testimony before the Montgomery County Council September 17, 2009

My name is Anne Deslattes Mays, I'm a scientist working currently at KeyGene, Inc, an international Plant Genomics Corporation with headquarters in Wageningen, Netherlands, offices world wide and now an office in Rockville, MD. <sup>i</sup> I have worked for a number of biotech companies, not the least of which was Celera Genomics. I started the software group there working for Craig Venter as employee #11. I hired 60 of the 550 employees that were employed there at one point in its hey-day.

Celera was the kind of company that Montgomery County is seeking in its vision for the future. Celera looked for empty cheap real estate to house it's operations. These operations required 109,000 square footage. The square footage is again available – because 11 years after its start in Montgomery County it has removed itself from this footprint. Using this as a guide – it would take **200 Celera's** to fill the proposed new office space that the LSC contains.<sup>ii</sup>

I have lived in Washingtonian Woods for 20 years. I grew up in Rockville, my father came here in the early 60s to work at NIST. 10 years ago, National Geographic sought to build on 40 Acres off of Route 28, between Westleigh and Lakelands and behind Washingtonian Woods. You would think that a corporation such as National Geographic would respect the environment, not build on steep slopes, protect old-growth trees and stream beds. They did not. The “Save the Woods” campaign began when the National Geographic real estate team with Toll Brothers put their proposal together. Many of the same claims that Johns Hopkins is making were also made. Buffers, etc. will be put in place. But it was not enough. They were seeking to develop within an intolerable distance of the Muddy Branch stream bed. Disrupting the wildlife corridor that connects Muddy Branch to the Potomac wildlife corridor where the C and O canal lays. History tells us, there is no reason to expect a non-profit organization with as great a name as Johns Hopkins and of National Geographic to do the right thing.

This is why we elect the officials we do. To represent the interests of its citizenry and we rely upon them to be proper stewards to the land that surrounds them. Because of the work that the “Save the Woods” campaign did with the City of Gaithersburg and National Geographic, environmental standards were developed by the City of Gaithersburg. I ask that Montgomery County adopt the City of Gaithersburg Environmental Standards.<sup>iii</sup>

The Belward property sits in a gap between the cities of Gaithersburg and Rockville. The Belward property is shaped much like a pentagon and is surrounded 4/5's by residents of those cities. On September 3, an on-line petition was started to protest the outrageous proposal sitting in front of you now. The Gaithersburg West Master Plan is such a shocking proposal because of its scale and lack of respect to these existing residents, it is hard to know where to begin to protest it. The “NEIGHBORS AGAINST MONTGOMERY COUNTY GAITHERSBURG WEST MASTER PLAN PROPOSAL” may be found online at <http://mocomap.epetitions.net/>. I attach a current version of this petition.<sup>iv</sup> We have signatures from each of the surrounding neighborhoods and as of this evening, there are over 240 signatures collected in a short amount of time. I would say this is the tip of the iceberg. Every reasonable adult, scientist, parent and resident in these neighborhoods who lives here and wants to remain here is opposed to the proposal in front of you. We have one signature from a visitor from Freeport, Maine who wrote *“I was a visitor to the area recently, and immediately my eyes were drawn to the beauty of this farmland. I was told that it was going to be turned into a new development, and that horrified me. I cannot understand this decision at all.”*

The company I now work for, KeyGene, is based in Wageningen, Netherlands. Wageningen is the Life Science center of the Netherlands and shares many similarities to Rockville, Maryland and to Montgomery County. It is rural in character. It is residential and it houses companies committed to solving the world hunger problem, water use scarcity of plant resources, and seeks to use the latest in computational and biotechnical means to do so. It is also the most amazing bike city I have ever seen. Bikes are given their own cross walk signals. Bikeways are separated from road ways and are given the right of way at most intersections and roundabouts. Bikes are everywhere with alleys behind homes dedicated to their silent passage. Residents, cars, offices, schools, pedestrians and bikes are seamlessly woven together preserving the nature of the land and enabling commuting to train stations, restaurants and businesses. This isn't an unreal idea, and in Wageningen, Netherlands, it is an achieved ideal.

We have the opportunity in Montgomery County to preserve our rural legacy, create similar bikeways. But only if we really have a true vision for Montgomery County. Not a vision that is dictated by a developer who wishes to build on property that falls in the gap between two cities with the hope that the residents surrounding it will not fight it. There is no vision in this plan that supports the health and well-being of its residents. If there was, then we would see road lessening and bike route creation. There would be lane elimination off of Key West Highway so that one lane would be dedicated to those residents, like myself who wish to commute the 5 miles from their house in the City of Gaithersburg, to their place of work in Rockville. We would see proposed an connected and interconnected bike route system that would allow commuters, school children and residents to leave their cars at home and travel by bike to restaurants, schools and businesses.

KeyGene just celebrated its 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary, I was fortunate to have the opportunity to begin with them and join them in Wageningen for this celebration. I look forward to working with them for the next 20 years. I agree that you should plan big and dream big but I feel that to do so, you have to take all things into account. You have to take the residents where they live now, the land as it is now and imagine how you would really like this to be.

Montgomery County should listen to its residents and SCALE BACK the plans it has in front of them. Thank-you.

- i See attachment of Anne Deslattes Mays' appointment to KeyGene, Inc.
- ii <http://washington.bizjournals.com/washington/stories/2009/05/25/story2.html>, discussing its endpoint.

“The landlord, Columbia, Md.-based [Corporate Office Properties Trust](#), is working with Rockville-based [Scheer Partners Inc.](#) to market the 109,000-square-foot building’s combination of lab and office space to companies in and out of the biotech sector. But COPT acknowledges that this a tough market to be hawking empty real estate, particularly often-pricier lab space.

“It has been slow,” said Cathy Ward, COPT’s senior vice president of asset management and leasing.

- iii See attachment of the City of Gaithersburg Environmental Standards, adopted by the City in 2001.
- iv See NEIGHBORS AGAINST MONTGOMERY COUNTY GAITHERSBURG WEST MASTER PLAN PROPOSAL petition attachment – it is only a snapshot of the petition, it is online and residents continue to sign it and voice their opposition to this plan.