TESTIMONY ON GAITHERSBURG WEST MASTER PLAN

September 17, 2009

Good evening. My name is Diana Conway, speaking on behalf of Montgomery Countryside Alliance, a regional coalition advocating for land-use and transportation policies to protect open space and farmland.

MCA shares the concerns of local residents that the scale of this venture introduces an unprecedented level of change to established communities around it. The plan could triple employment and triple-to quadruple the built square-footage. The attendant increases in congestion, school over-crowding, and housing cost pressures are as inevitable as they are disastrous. We are told the traffic impact of thousands of new homes, tens of thousands of new jobs, and nearly 20 million square feet of construction will be addressed by the Corridor Cities Transitway. But the plan lacks any enforcement components if ridership targets are not met. Targets are not plans. For the record, we deeply oppose **any** weakening of the staging requirements.

This massive construction blitz would send its congestion rippling far beyond the immediate communities. It would push development and density further outward, violating the long planned and protected low density agricultural/open space reserve – the County's nationally recognized region served solely by ground water and septic, Rural & Rustic Roads, and home to critical food production, high quality watersheds and dense forest. This region is both vital and fragile. Moreover, by creating a massive urban core so far from major transportation, this proposal deflates efforts at urban renewal elsewhere. It draws more commuters to the western side of our county --- further exacerbating the jobs/housing imbalance between the County's eastern and western zones.

In particular, the sheer scale of this plan significantly jeopardizes the viability of the planned "Life Sciences Center—East" on Route 29. That vision is a lynchpin of growth and jobs-development for chronically underserved communities on the east side of the County. Moreover, protecting the Belward Farm as Mrs. Banks intended should be a question of honor for Johns Hopkins University, as a simple matter of integrity. Finally, speaking in part as a member of the Sustainability Working Group of Montgomery County, this and all master plans should adhere more convincingly to the critical importance of sustainability. We do not see that value reflected in the six- and eight-lane car-centric road plans, the exacerbated job/housing imbalance, the lack of open space and truly pedestrian- and bike-friendly paths, the many grade-separated overpasses creating isolated islands of concrete bounded by asphalt, or the inadequacy of the CCT as proposed.

In closing, we urge the Council to act on the crying need for a reduction in the density and scale of this project. We are not anti-science; we are anti-disaster. We ask the Council to fairly analyze the alternative plans, which volunteers have worked so hard to supply to you. We respectfully suggest that a world-class science center can be built, without paving over this area and without creating so much burden and distress for the surrounding communities to bear.

We ask you to significantly reduce the scale of this plan. Thank you,

Diana E. Conway, Potomac MD