

Dear Councilmember,

As the Gaithersburg West Master Plan comes down to the final deliberations, the residents of the Gaithersburg-North Potomac-Rockville Coalition remain concerned about many unresolved issues. Although we have questioned Johns Hopkins Real Estate, the Planning Board, the Planning, Housing and Economic Development (PHED) Committee and Montgomery County Executive Ike Leggett, the issues have yet to be addressed. This master plan will fundamentally change the entire character of our area and will profoundly affect our community in a negative way. But area residents were not involved in the formulation of the master plan and our concerns and suggestions have, for the most part, been ignored.

As we have said from the beginning of this process, we support the sensible expansion of the Life Sciences Center, the Shady Grove Adventist Hospital, the corporations in Life Sciences North and area biomedical organizations.

However, the Gaithersburg West Master Plan proposes 20 million square feet of commercial space and 9 million square feet of residential space. As we've noted the Pentagon is 6.6 million square feet, so the Master Plan proposes development **equivalent to four and a half Pentagons** for the area between Shady Grove Road and Muddy Branch Road—an already congested suburban area which is five miles from the nearest Metro station.

Also to be considered: the Crown Farm development is back on track just north of the “Science City”, potentially adding another 5,000 residents, more workers for the commercial development plus the teachers and students at a new high school.

The Planning Board said early on that the high level of density in the Science City was required to provide sufficient ridership to apply for funding for the Corridor Cities Transitway (CCT). However, ridership numbers are already in place to build the CCT “even if the Gaithersburg West Master Plan is scrapped”, according to Rick Kiegel, Project Director, Maryland Transit Administration.

We maintain that the Planning Board used the CCT as an excuse to call the area around the Science City “urban”, even though it is full of suburban subdivisions with limited access and dead-end streets with cul-de-sacs. The “urban” designation was erroneously used in order to use traffic modeling that would allow much higher levels of congestion.

The Planning Board would have you believe that the Corridor Cities Transitway (CCT) will be the magic carpet that will whisk 70,000 to 100,000 people in and out of the 1.5 square mile Science City. Nothing could be further from the truth. According to authoritative estimates, the CCT will carry only about 12% to 15% of the people, leaving 85% in their cars which will necessitate the widening of the roads to six- and eight-lanes in addition to the construction of five multilevel highway interchanges, many of which will be located next to residential neighborhoods. And, after 20 years or more of constant road construction, **when the CCT and the proposed infrastructure is in place, the Planning Board is still predicting average rush hour speed will be 9 mph, if all goes well. Is anyone paying attention to this madness?**

How can these conditions be good for businesses or residents? Why would anyone want to live or work in an area that will be under construction for the next 20 to 30 years with the hope, at the conclusion, they will only be able to drive 9 mph on a good day? The roads will be gridlocked and the residents will be held captive in dead-end streets in their subdivisions.

Among the specific issues that remain unresolved in the Gaithersburg West Mast Plan:

1. The master plan proposes the equivalent of four and a half Pentagons in the area between Shady Grove Road and Muddy Branch Road. However, unlike the Pentagon, the area is filled with universities, a regional hospital and doctor's offices so the patients, students and visitors must be tallied along with the proposed 70,000 to 80,000 workers and residents. How can potentially

100,000+ people be accommodated between Shady Grove Road and Muddy Branch Road without shutting down all the roads in the western half of the county?

2. Last month the County's top traffic expert Glen Orlin spoke about traffic congestion and commuting patterns under the draft plan. He explained that, even assuming that 30% of the commuters to the Life Science Center will car-pool or use some alternate form of transport (highly unlikely), and the permissible level of congestion would be increased by a whopping 10%, it is "more likely the traffic congestion will be at the borderline between tolerable and intolerable." This shocking conclusion from the County's own traffic expert should weigh heavily on the full Council.
3. The fiscal analysis projects 10,000 academic jobs will be created as part of this plan. However, the recent Memorandum of Understanding between the County and Johns Hopkins shows that, once again, JHU has refused to commit to any tangible jobs' goals. The developers did not commit to build their own research center on Belward; they did not commit to establishing academic programs there; and they did not commit to putting any of their resources to fund this project. Why are there no guarantees to keep Johns Hopkins' Belward Campus from becoming little more than a generic commercial high-rise office park?
4. Some proponents have insisted that this master plan must be passed immediately in order to provide jobs for county residents. However, the current 1990 Gaithersburg Master Plan provides for enough unbuilt space to accommodate 17,000 more jobs in the Life Sciences areas. The Council has already approved the Germantown Master Plan for 68,000 jobs without the need for any staging. The vacancy rate in Germantown and Gaithersburg is currently 26%. Is there really an emergency to pass this master plan that has obvious errors in the traffic and fiscal analyses when the potential for so many jobs currently exists? If the potential for these jobs exists but the buildings are not full and the currently approved commercial space is not being built, whose fault is that? How does approving more space solve anything, especially when Johns Hopkins apparently has no particular plan for the enormous amount of space they are requesting on Belward?
5. The Master Plan's fiscal analysis predicts the project will be revenue neutral because of the tremendous investment in necessary infrastructure. In other words, it won't be the boon to the County that some advocates would like you to believe. There are organizations that may be able to turn this into a money-making venture but, overall, it will be revenue neutral. How is that good business for county coffers?
6. The fiscal analysis estimates that there would be 1,128 additional elementary school children in the Plan's area, but the Plan only provides for one elementary school, which could not sufficiently accommodate all of the children. Where would the rest of the elementary schoolchildren go to school, and has any capital cost been included in the cost estimate? If so, what is the estimated cost? What are the expectations regarding schools for the middle school and high school students, and any related costs?
7. Will the additional children require redistricting of existing schools?
8. The County says the Master Plan will be tightly managed through the staging plan. However, the PHED Committee proposes that the only concrete, touch and feel element in the entire staging plan is the construction of the CCT to Metropolitan Grove before Stage 3 and to Clarksburg before Stage 4. The Science City will add thousands of additional cars to the roads before the CCT is even begun and the CCT will carry only 12% to 15% of the residents and workers leaving 85% on the roads. Shouldn't we have some concrete plans? Or shouldn't we consider scaling this plan back so it will not overwhelm the area?
9. Councilmember Trachtenberg has asked the Planning Board to do a Health Impact Assessment and Analysis in conjunction with the Gaithersburg West Master Plan. It is imperative to assess the enormous health risks of having Great Seneca Highway widened to six-lanes along with the 10- and 12-lane, two- and three-level highway interchanges. Almost every subdivision along Great Seneca Highway has a recreation area or a swimming pool adjacent to the highway. Additionally, after the

road is widened to accommodate the CCT and the additional traffic, the road will be immediately adjacent to hundreds of homes, literally under the windows of some.

The traffic, after all the “improvements”, is expected to slow to an average of 9 mph which will result in long waits at traffic lights and significant “idling” which will produce dangerous levels of automobile exhaust. People, especially children, playing tennis, soccer or swimming at recreation facilities are particularly vulnerable to the effects of the emissions because the particulate matter is pulled further into their lungs during play. We strongly support any measures to assess the health impacts *before* voting on this master plan.

10. The county has completely ignored the concept of compatibility by proposing a high-rise, high-density commercial complex for 15,000 people in buildings up to 150 feet tall on the historic Belward Farm which is immediately adjacent to three residential neighborhoods. The land where the tallest buildings will be located is 50 feet above the rest of the community so the buildings will appear to be 200 feet tall. The county says the compatibility issues of these 200 ft buildings will be solved by allowing buffers on the periphery of the farm. Compatibility is about a lot more than buffers. Why hasn't the Planning Board insisted on compatibility with the historic farmstead and the existing neighborhoods? According to recent drawings by Johns Hopkins Real Estate, the historic farmstead will be hidden from view except for the narrow historic easement immediately in front of the farmstead.
11. The county insists that there will be walking paths around the environmental easements on the backside of the Belward Farm. However, the Recreation Department stated that there can be no paths--surface or raised--around the environmental easements near the North Potomac Recreation Center. Are the paths on Belward likely to evaporate from the plan as well, leaving even fewer amenities for the community?
12. The county has said the existing communities will be able to walk and bike to the Science City's new live, work, play area, but the Science City will be surrounded by six- and eight-lane highways with multilevel interchanges. That will make it difficult to get there by car, so walking and biking are out of the question. In fact, with the addition of the widened highways and multilevel highway interchanges, walking and biking will probably be out of the question for the entire area...even though it is being touted as a smart growth project.
13. The area is highly congested now and it is inconceivable that 60,000 to 80,000 additional cars will fit on the existing highways, even if another lane is added.
14. The County and Johns Hopkins touted the “Science City” as a 24-7 live, work, play area with restaurants and shops etc. The real plan apparently is for the addition of a couple of Panera Bread shops for the lunch crowd. At what point will real plans be revealed?
15. The plan calls for one-third of the space in LSC Central to be devoted to housing next to the hospital and near the new fire station. The fiscal analysis says these small condos will sell for \$550,000--complete with sirens and helicopters in surround sound. Is this a workable plan?
16. During the community meetings, the county touted the green space including the “linear parks” that were in fact median strips in the eight-lane highway. The LSC loop is being called a major recreational feature when in fact it will be a sidewalk that will cross 20 intersections and will cross the six-lane highway twice and the eight-lane highway twice. Are there any real amenities for the surrounding neighborhoods?
17. Johns Hopkins Real Estate used their 1996 plan that is covered with surface parking to the lot lines as a threat during the community meetings. If they don't get 4.6 to 6.5 million square feet of space, they could always use the 1996 plan, they said. The Planning Board said that JHU would need 4.6 million square feet of space in order to make structured parking feasible. Have they not looked across the street to the Danac property that has structured parking for about 300,000 square feet of space?

18. What exactly are the arrangements for the housing on Belward? What form will the housing take: single family houses, town houses, condos, dormitories, or a hotel? With **9,000** housing units in the Science City, why is it necessary to have more housing proposed for Belward? At first, it was said to be housing for visiting professors, then a place for people who come for seminars, and now it is being called "employee housing". Will Hopkins actually limit the housing to employees? Or is the housing just another potential money-making venture for Johns Hopkins?
19. The community has had very little meaningful impact on the Master Plan. Could that be because the County knew going in that the community would be rightfully opposed to this outrageous master plan?
20. Finally, there is the issue of the resentment that Johns Hopkins is being allowed to get away with deceiving an elderly woman by paying her \$35 million less than her property was worth without any intention of following her wishes. Is the Council okay with this land-grab as long as it might put money into county coffers? Why isn't anyone dealing with the issues of morality and ethics in regard to Johns Hopkins' self-serving plans?

The Gaithersburg West Master Plan could be a win-win proposition for everyone, but not as it is currently written and not without meaningful input from the community. The proposed plan is fundamentally flawed and cannot be explained or justified because it has been contrived for one purpose: to put 15,000 people on Belward Farm. Worst of all, it creates a large, dense center five miles from the nearest Metro station, at the request of an ambitious land owner.

Please think very carefully about your support for the Gaithersburg West Master Plan. Are you willing to approve a plan that will likely change the character of an entire suburban community and produce intolerable traffic congestion? The residents of the Gaithersburg - North Potomac - Rockville Coalition urge you to revisit the fiscal and transportation analyses, and scale it back using honest and accurate numbers. The Cities of Rockville and Gaithersburg have passed detailed Resolutions that demand more careful analysis. We are looking for you to deliver better results.

For more information on the master plan, please see www.scale-it-back.com.

Best regards,
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The Gaithersburg - North Potomac - Rockville Coalition