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Gaithersburg
A CHARACTER COUNTS! CITY

January 25, 2010

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The Honorable Nancy Floreen
President, Montgomery County Council
Council Office Building
100 Maryland Avenue
Rockville MD 20850

2010 JAN 27 AM 9:53

MONTGOMERY COUNTY
COUNCIL

RE: Gaithersburg West Master Plan

Dear President Floreen: *Nancy*

The purpose of this letter is to relay the City of Gaithersburg's comments regarding the Gaithersburg West Master Plan, in advance of decisions the Montgomery County Council may make.

The City has been following this draft plan very closely and has provided a series of policy and technical suggestions. While the plan covers the unincorporated areas west of Gaithersburg, the primary focus of effort and public discussion has been the Life Sciences Center (LSC).

The plan for the LSC is seen as a long term concept that could take as many as 45 years to implement. While the City believes it is generally a good plan, we are extremely concerned about the impact of some of the traffic improvements necessary to support the proposed densities. Further, we are concerned that the proposed LSC plan could move forward with higher traffic congestion impacts (1600 CLV) than other projects in the City of Gaithersburg or the Gaithersburg West Planning Area (1450 CLV).

The Draft Gaithersburg West Master Plan calls for very limited additional County densities outside of the LSC. In fact, the plan is generally supportive of annexation by the City of Gaithersburg of the McGowan Tract and several enclaves.

The City would therefore like to offer the following comments:

1. The City is extremely supportive of the concept of staging the approved density of the LSC based on transportation milestones; however, residential development should also be addressed in the various staging. Transportation impacts related to housing increases should be acknowledged.

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2. The City is generally supportive of the concept of the LSC, but is concerned about the conceptual traffic improvements necessary to accommodate the proposed density. Of particular concern are the proposed grade separated interchanges at the following

locations: Sam Eig Highway at Great Seneca Highway, Great Seneca Highway at Muddy Branch Road, and Great Seneca Highway at Quince Orchard Road. Accordingly, we request that the Stage 3 provision requiring funding of two interchanges be modified with alternative transportation projects.

Based on the conceptual improvements provided to date, the City believes that these grade separated interchanges could require the taking of both residential and commercial properties, would harm pedestrian and bicycle conductivity, and would adversely affect the character of existing neighborhoods. Further, a number of these grade separated interchanges could adversely affect the current and proposed alternative alignment of the CCT.

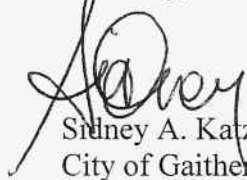
3. Given that the Gaithersburg West Master Plan will be reviewed again in six years, the City would request that the proposed 4.5 million square feet of LSC Stage 4 density not be approved at this time. Prior to the next Master Plan review, the County and the various stakeholders could attempt to develop alternative traffic improvements and trip mitigation measures that would not have the adverse impacts outlined in item #2 above.
4. The City is concerned about the proposal to establish a higher traffic congestion standard for the LSC than the standard that is applied in the City of Gaithersburg and the remainder of the Gaithersburg West Planning Area.
5. In the event MTA approves an alternate alignment of the CCT to accommodate the LSC, the County should take immediate steps to acquire the necessary right-of-way and the land for the transit stations. Failure to do so could result in delays in construction of the CCT given that most of the other necessary land is already available. Further, should the CCT not receive Federal or State funding, the Plan should address alternative phasing and densities.
6. The City is pleased that the plan envisions the annexation of the McGowan Tract, and will coordinate our efforts closely with Park and Planning and the County. A key goal of this proposed annexation will be the acquisition of the land for the remaining quadrant of the Watkins Mill Road Interchange.
7. The City is very pleased about the County's recent restoration of the Deer Park/Humpback Bridge, and concurs with the Planning Board's recommendation concerning the need for ongoing assessment of the bridge's condition to address safety, mobility, and historic preservation issues.

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8. As the proposed development moves forward in the planning process, it is extremely important to link this development to existing City neighborhoods with good pedestrian and bicycle connections.
9. The City is very supportive of the concept of reserving land for an elementary school at the LSC.

The City of Gaithersburg appreciates your consideration of our comments and concerns.

Sincerely,



Sidney A. Katz, Mayor
City of Gaithersburg

cc: The Honorable Isiah Leggett, Montgomery County Executive
Montgomery County Councilmembers
Glen Orlin, County Council Deputy Staff Director