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5104 Elm St., Bethesda MD 20814 (301)652-6359 email--theelms518@earthlink.net

MCCF TESTIMONY TO PLANNING BOARD ON THE STAFF DRAFT REVISION
OF THE GAITHERSBURG WEST SECTOR PLAN

I am Jim Humphrey testifying on behalf of the Montgomery County Civic Federation as Chair of the Planning and Land Use Committee.

When examining master plan revisions, a chief focus of the Federation is determining whether all necessary information and data are presented in a clear and concise manner so that area stakeholders, the Board, and Council understand the proposed changes. We are pleased to see the chart on page 21 that the Federation recommended be included in each proposed master plan revision, which shows residential and non-residential density in four categories: existing; in the pipeline; allowed under the current plan; and, allowed under the proposed plan revision. But, the housing numbers in the chart are not the same as those in the text (Draft Plan - pg. 16).

In checking for clarity, we found that essential information was left out of the staging recommended for three of the five districts in the planning area--the LSC Central, West and Belward Districts (pg. 62). Staff proposes a maximum amount of non-residential square footage, including existing and pipeline, be allowed in each of three stages. But we could find no mention of the starting point--the current amount of existing and pipeline non-residential square footage in those districts. This is needed to figure the amount of new development being recommended in each of the three stages.

We urge you to link the staging for non-residential development with the residential component in this plan. Otherwise housing could be built before sufficient jobs are provided in the area, which would force new residents into their cars to commute to employment elsewhere, since an effective transit alternative may not exist for years. Also, approval of the majority of new development in this planning area should be staged to coincide with, or after, the opening of the CCT from Shady Grove to the area.

To that end, we urge the Board to work with the County Executive and Council, and our Senators and Representatives in Congress, in advocating for change in the Federal transit funding process. The new administration in Washington must allow counties and cities to request funding for transit projects that anticipate future growth, instead of only after

new growth has generated sufficient numbers of riders who then commute on increasingly congested roads while awaiting transit. It would be disastrous to repeat the mistake made in Clarksburg and invite residents to move into newly created housing, and employees to take newly created jobs, in the supposed transit-oriented communities of Gaithersburg West and Germantown when they may not see that transit for many years.

It is difficult for citizens to comment on the proposal to rezone nearly half of the acreage in the planning area into an LSC Zone recommended for altered standards ("modified to permit more uses, density and height" - pg.21), without knowing what specific changes to the zoning standards will be sought.

The LSC West District (PSTA site) is recommended for TMX-2 zoning, which has 1.0 FAR density and a 43 foot height limit for Standard Method development. The height limit for TMX -2 Optional Method is not specified in the zoning ordinance but instead should be set in master plans where the zone is used, yet there is no height limit in the plan for this District recommended for TMX. In addition, it is not stated whether staff recommend transfer of density between parcels in this proposed Transit Station Development Area. Through use of TDRs, BLTs, and density transfer within the district, could the threshold be reached which would trigger a requirement for workforce housing near the future CCT station (approximately 2.0 FAR or 40 dwelling units per acre)? If so, the workforce housing law would grant additional density above that already allowed under TMX Optional Method coupled with MPDU density bonus. The height of buildings near the CCT station in the PSTA, then, could greatly exceed the 110 foot height building height recommended near the Belward CCT station or the 143 foot height building height recommended near the CCT station in the LSC Central District.

We are concerned that staff has not adequately explained to area residents the heights and densities possible in the LSC West (PSTA) District. We know that transportation data necessary to understanding the impact of this proposed plan revision was only recently made available, even though public meetings began last fall. And residents had their repeated requests for creation of a citizens' advisory committee rejected by Planning Department staff. A primary concern of the Federation's is that you allow residents of Gaithersburg, North Potomac and Rockville, who will be impacted by this plan, meaningful opportunity to provide their input during upcoming worksessions.

Thank you.