

Testimony for County Council, September 15, 2009

My name is Jan Fine. I am a resident of Mission Hills and live on Mission Drive. My home lies on the border of the plan area as it backs up to Belward Farm. As a member of Residents for Reasonable Development I urge you, Council President Andrews and Council Members, to protest the density proposed for Gaithersburg West.

RRD presented an alternative plan to the Planning Board. This REASONABLE plan calls for significantly less density than the Board is attempting to adopt, yet agrees with the concept of a Life Sciences Center. Build it, but build it within reason. The Reasonable Plan defined a Life Sciences core or city center that would lie closer to Shady Grove Hospital and the current Johns Hopkins University building on Medical Center Drive LSC Central and North. The tallest buildings would be grouped in one area, and, like the top of a tent allow the development to slope downward as it extends outward, thus enabling a seamless blend into the fabric of the existing area and keep the height away from current residential areas. We believe this would also serve the CCT well and help to reduce traffic on the roads.

Belward Farm was never intended to be a place where high rises would grow. Elizabeth Banks legacy was to provide a CAMPUS for research - she envisioned a University campus setting that would fit into the suburban fabric of our area. Please recommend that the "City" be built at LSC Central and allow Belward as a campus "village."

Belward Farm is closest to neighborhoods, farthest from the current center of biomedical concerns, farthest by transit from the center of the I-270 Corridor, and is the last major green EXPANSE in the planning area. RRD recommends preserving this green expanse as a major green park with an extended lawns that could be used for picnics, festivals, and outdoor entertainment like Strathmore, provide plenty of thinking space for researchers, and become an area that Montgomery County and its residents could enjoy. It would be more in keeping with the historic farmstead preserve, and would satisfy the legacy of Elizabeth Banks as a research campus.

The planners of Central Park in NYC got it right and so could Montgomery County. County Planners could implement a program similar to the one used to create the Ag Preserve using Transfer of Development Rights credits. The use of TDRs would place more of the development in the central plan area while keeping Belward Farm more than 50 percent intact. This is a win-win situation for Montgomery County and Johns Hopkins. Remember, our motto "green is the new black."

Reduction of the proposed density would limit the level of allowable build-out yet still have little impact upon traffic congestion. The planning boards recommendation of a revisit to the master plan in the next 6-10 years provides a good safeguard to justify strict limits on density now.

Finally, please note that neither JHU nor the planning staff has offered a detailed plan for the use of the Belward Farm property that would justify the densities that have been proposed.

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