

May 4, 2009

Ronald J. Daniels, President
The Johns Hopkins University
Office of the President, 242 Garland Hall
3400 N. Charles Street
Baltimore, Md. 21218

Dear President Daniels,

The Gaithersburg – North Potomac – Rockville Coalition represents residents from over 35 subdivisions in the community that surrounds Belward Farm. We were initially relieved that the farm was sold to Johns Hopkins, but relief has turned to disappointment and growing frustration with the proposal for an enormous commercial development on a farm that is one of the most beautiful pieces of property in Montgomery County.

Johns Hopkins courted Belward Farm's former owner, Elizabeth Banks, for years in order to purchase this bucolic property which had been in her family for over 100 years. She finally sold it for \$5 million, a price much below its \$40 million estimated value. Deed restrictions were included to fulfill her desire that the land be used by Johns Hopkins for a minimally intrusive educational or research campus that would honor the heritage of the farm. The land would have commanded a far higher price if the restrictions were not included in the deed. Ms. Banks, however, wanted her land used in a certain manner and accepted a lower price in exchange for imposing the use restrictions.

If Johns Hopkins does not honor the deed restrictions, Ms. Banks will not have received the benefit of the agreement. (See enclosed deed.)

The enormous high-rise buildings currently proposed by JHU with the crushing density of the housing, retail and other undisclosed uses of the commercial complex, will not honor her wishes or carry on the legacy of Belward Farm. Although the obligatory historic easement has been set aside, Johns Hopkins is using the accommodating language, "and related purposes", to nullify the essential purpose of the deed restrictions.

Ms. Banks meticulously cared for the farm where she lived for most of her life until she died in 2005 at the age of 93. We, the area residents, have known for years that Johns Hopkins would, after Ms. Banks' death, build on Belward Farm and we fully support the expansion of biomedical and life sciences research. However, the proposed high-rise commercial development is not what Ms. Banks wanted for her farm nor is it what JHU promised to provide. And it is not what we were led to believe would be built on this

property, our most beloved landmark which conveys such a strong sense of place for our community.

In complete opposition to the requests expressed by residents in earlier community sessions, Johns Hopkins announced, in December, that they would build 4.6 to 6.5 million square feet of space on Belward Farm. The vague presentations since have attempted to make this plan more palatable but the underlying message remains the same: 4.6 million to 6.5 million square feet of space will be built on the farm. Johns Hopkins' representatives insist they are listening to the concerns of the community but these totally unacceptable numbers for Belward remain the same.

The presentations given by Johns Hopkins repeat the same platitudes over and over, like the need for "taller buildings" when JHU is already requesting building heights of 110 feet and perhaps up to 143 feet. JHU will need to "increase the local density" when in reality, it is requesting space for 14,000 to 20,000 people on the 107 acre farm. This is comparable to the density of an urban area near a downtown Metro station. We have been asked to accept this plan for "science", even though we have no idea what kind of science JHU has in mind.

To give you a sense of scale, the JHU Homewood campus is 140 acres and Belward Farm is 107 acres. According to the JHU website, there are approximately 50 buildings on the Homewood campus. The proposed 4.6 million sq feet of space on Belward Farm would be equivalent to 146 Mason Halls. And 6.5 million sq ft of space on Belward Farm would be equivalent to 235 Mason Halls even though Belward Farm is almost 25% smaller than Homewood.

Belward Farm is not the place to build a "city" – even a "Science City". And it is certainly not a vacant lot to be filled with non-descript, visually incompatible high-rise buildings which will dwarf the historical farmstead and the surrounding residential neighborhoods. Belward Farm is a special place that deserves world-class, site-sensitive architecture and landscaping, designed to complement the historic buildings and the pastoral setting, not to overwhelm it.

The architecture should echo the curves and angles of the farmstead. It should capitalize on the contours of the land and maintain as much of the beautiful farm as possible. The beauty of the farm should be the starting point for the design rather than something to fence off and work around as the current plans suggest.

The proposed development on Belward Farm does not fall within the intended purposes of the deed restrictions and it is not the appropriate location for this massive development. The farm is in the middle of an established, suburban residential community with already congested roads and it is five miles from the nearest Metro station. The design of the subdivisions makes public transit almost impossible. The Science City is being touted as a transit-oriented area with the Corridor Cities Transitway as the centerpiece of this plan. The Corridor Cities Transitway has been on the books since 1964. If it is built, it will probably be a bus and will be inadequate to

service the transit needs of the area since it is expected to carry only 15% of the workforce. And it certainly cannot be used to justify the proposed density while ignoring the incredible traffic congestion the development will inevitably cause.

In consideration of all these factors, Johns Hopkins must reconsider their current plans for Belward Farm in favor of an educational or research campus with much lower density that would fulfill the intentions of the deed restrictions and would be compatible with the land, the historic farmstead and the community. The excessive density must be reduced so it does not destroy the farm and overwhelm the local infrastructure.

If the development on Belward Farm met these criteria and was architecturally designed to be an asset to the community, the residents would fully support Johns Hopkins' vision for Belward Farm. As it stands now, we are firmly against it.

Best regards,

Donna H. Baron
The Gaithersburg – North Potomac – Rockville Coalition

Enclosures

Cc:
Ms. Pamela P. Flaherty, Chair, Board of Trustees
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