

## Remarks by the North Potomac Citizens Association (NPCA)

### TOWN HALL MEETING ON THE GAITHERSBURG WEST DRAFT MASTER PLAN

March 9, 2010

NPCA works on behalf of North Potomac's 25,000 residents, most of whom live within a short drive of the proposed Life Sciences Center. Many in the community are excited about the prospect of a vibrant and world-class bio-tech center in the area. The community overwhelmingly supports having a science center on Belward and nearby areas. What the community, and other organizations from across the County oppose, however, is the building of a Science City, with 15-story and 10-story buildings packed like sardines. The draft Plan permits the equivalent office space and density of downtown Bethesda on Belward Farm alone. JHU may seek two million more SF on Belward, which would allow it to build a complex the rivals the Pentagon.

Tonite you will hear from others how many aspects to the draft master plan are flawed. So, instead I want address topics that relate to you as At-Large Council members who are running for re-election soon.

First, I will describe the growing groundswell of opposition to the proposed plan that should not be ignored. It encompasses the Cities of Gaithersburg and Rockville, and individuals and organizations from all over the County. It also includes a loose network of Hopkins alumni who are embarrassed and upset that their alma mater is trying to ride roughshod over the affected communities. They expected more from their esteemed university. So did we. I will conclude by looking at recent activities and proposing how the Council should move forward by sending the Plan back to the Planning Board for revisions.

So, just how big is this opposition? It includes local and national organizations with thousands of members. They live as far north as Sugarloaf Mountain and throughout the Ag Reserve, they live in the western part of the County, as far south as Rockville, and east as Silver Spring.

These constituents of yours represent some of the best educated, most experienced minds in the entire country. They are urban planners, transit experts, environmentalists, and bio-tech employees. They are also community activists, and rush hour commuters who drive along these roads every day and night. Unfortunately, they all share the feeling of being marginalized and ignored by the Council.

Further, the Mayors of Rockville and Gaithersburg felt compelled to hold an historic meeting with the County Council last week, during which they expressed many of the same concerns about traffic and infrastructure that have been raised by these groups. Gaithersburg Mayor Sydney Katz is quoted by the Gazette newspaper as saying, "I am hopeful we will be taken seriously," but then added, "Now to what degree is yet to be seen." This is a travesty that the City of Gaithersburg should feel so disenfranchised.

Just over the last 48 hours The City of Gaithersburg issued a very strongly worded resolutions that include a litany of shortcomings with the draft plan.

I caution you tonite that these thousands and thousands of voters from all across the County will remember your actions on the draft Plan come the September primary. Perhaps some of you think that Science City will not be an election issue, that the #1 issue is jobs. We are seeing and hearing otherwise. For example, the Sierra Club is developing a scorecard of Council votes that will help it decide who it endorses in the upcoming elections. The Life Sciences Center will be one such issue.

Looking ahead, I want to discuss some recent actions and propose how the Council should move forward. Last month the County's top traffic expert Glen Orlin testified about traffic congestion and commuting patterns under the draft Plan. He explained that even WITH assuming that 30% of the commuters to the Life Science Center will either car pool or use some alternate form of transport, AND increasing the permissible level of congestion 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.

So, is the best that we can do? Are the At-Large members willing to approve a plan that will likely produce intolerable traffic congestion. NPCA urges you to revisit these numbers, revisit this analysis, and strive for better. The Cities of Rockville and Gaithersburg have just passed detailed Resolutions that demand more. We are looking for you to deliver better results.

Finally, I want to look ahead at the full council's timetable for taking action on the draft Plan. The Council is supposedly considering fast-tracking the Plan and may try to approve it within the next few weeks. This would be a mistake, especially given the county wide opposition to many aspects of the draft Plan, and the laundry list of questions, issues and concerns recently put forth by both Rockville and Gaithersburg.

The Plan is way too CCD -- Controversial, Complicated and Deficient -- to fast track its approval. Instead, The Council should Send-It-Back to the Planning Board with specific recommendations for improving the Plan. These recommendations should reflect the needs of all of your constituents, from all around the County.

Thank you.

(Remarks given by Dan Drazan, President of North Potomac Citizens Association)