

OPPOSITION TO THE GAITHERSBURG WEST MASTER PLAN

The remarks below were not made by well-paid lobbyists.

Mayor Sidney Katz and City Council of Gaithersburg: "While we recognize that a vibrant, diverse Life Sciences Center would be an economic advantage for Montgomery County and Gaithersburg, we are extremely concerned by the proposed density and the potential negative impact on the quality of life of the surrounding neighborhoods, including those in Gaithersburg and Rockville," said Gaithersburg Mayor Sidney Katz. "The City Council and I have outlined twelve issues that are critical to the harmonious success of this development, and we have asked the Montgomery County Council to consider them before moving forward."

Mayor Phyllis Marcuccio and City Council of Rockville: The City of Rockville cannot support the Planning Board Draft in its current form and recommends that the Montgomery County Council refer it back to the Montgomery County Planning Board to resolve the issues outlined in this Resolution and in that of the City of Gaithersburg.

Delegate Saqib Ali: The issue of the Gaithersburg West is *not nearly* such an intractable issue. To me there seems ample room for both sides to easily make compromises on how to build the Life Sciences Center. I think this should be a win-win for everyone involved.

Delegate Kirill Reznik: I know that the opponents of the scale and size of the proposed Gaithersburg West Project are not opposed to expanded business and life sciences development, not opposed to the CCT, and not opposed to general growth, but feel that all of this could be achieved with a smaller project that will not affect and upend so many people through increased traffic, both because of construction and because of the population growth after, and general strain on resources. In this, I could not agree more. I do believe that a smaller version of the project will be able to achieve the same ends, and that we should strive for it.

Joe Alfandre, Montgomery County Planning Board: The proposed Plan is one of water spilling helter-skelter across a flat surface instead of a concentration of new growth into a vibrant, "City Center." Rather than a "Science City," the plan recommends a series of "Science Villages."

Hans Riemer, candidate for County Council at-large: A separate but also critical issue that needs to be addressed at the time of the Gaithersburg West deliberations is the impact of this proposal on job growth and community building around transit areas down-county and east-county. Preliminary projections show a startling decline in economic growth for these areas if Gaithersburg West is approved. This does not have to be the case. We must ask now, what changes will be needed to ensure that all of Montgomery County can thrive even as so much new investment flows to the Gaithersburg West area? This discussion should be had before the vote, not after it, and rather than blithe assurances from planners and elected officials we need real data and specific ideas.

Jim Humphrey, Chair, Montgomery County Civic Federation, Planning and Land Use Comm., February 11, 2010: When the members of the Council's Planning, Housing and Economic Development Committee met with the Planning Board and Department on June 15, 2009, for the first worksession on the Germantown plan, Board Chairman Royce Hanson was asked a disarmingly simple sounding question: "Would the upzoning of properties recommended in the revised Germantown and Gaithersburg West master plans absorb all of the current market demand for science and technology space in the county?" He replied that he believed those two master plans would absorb all of the market demand for science and technology space in the county, and not only at present but probably for many years to come, given the current national economic crisis.

David Hauck, Sierra Club, September 17, 2009: Rather than focus on the specifics of the Gaithersburg West master plan and its impact on the immediate area, I want to take a look at how the proposed development at Gaithersburg West is likely to undermine two of the county's smart growth goals. The first goal is to direct development to Metro station areas. The second is to direct more job growth to the eastern part of the county as a way to correct the current jobs/housing imbalance—more jobs than housing in the west and more people than jobs in the east county.

Darian Unger, Silver Spring Advisory Board, February 16, 2010: The Silver Spring Advisory Board has several concerns related to the proposed Gaithersburg West Master Plan. Most notably, this plan does not appear to advance true smart growth principles and is not the walkable, transit-oriented development that the county should promote. Rather than continuing to concentrate jobs and growth along the northern part of the I-270 corridor, the County should focus new growth in closer-in, higher-density, walkable areas with access to high levels of public transportation.

David Alpert, from the “Gaithersbungle” series on Greater Greater Washington: If this area is going to be a Science City in the next generation, it shouldn't have the huge superblocks and "neverland" FARs more familiar to places like Tysons, which are working so hard to surmount their design flaws. At best, this development will be just another pile of office-park sprawl like so many others in Montgomery County, which will be very hard to transform into anything better a generation or two or three from now. But the danger goes much deeper. By adding so many square feet of office potential so quickly, this project will suck development away from the rest of the County, in places like Shady Grove, White Flint, White Oak, and Silver Spring which actually need it. In other words, it's borrowing from the future to recreate the bad designs of the past.

Donna Baron, The Gaithersburg - North Potomac - Rockville Coalition: The Gaithersburg West Master Plan could be a win-win proposition for everyone, but not as it is currently written and not without meaningful input from the community. The proposed plan is fundamentally flawed and cannot be explained or justified because it has been contrived for one purpose: to put 15,000 people on Belward Farm. Worst of all, it creates a high-density, high-rise commercial complex five miles from the nearest Metro station, at the request of an ambitious land owner.

Pamela Lindstrom, Residents for Reasonable Development, 9 March 2010: This plan overreaches – it contains too much development based on unrealistic claims about public facilities, the presumption that it's OK to impose much more crowding on us, faulty fiscal analysis, NO environmental analysis or greenhouse gas analysis. You can't proceed without coming to grips with these issues.

Audubon Naturalist Society statement on Gaithersburg West Master Plan, October 29, 2009: Since 1897, the Audubon Naturalist Society has worked to protect our region's natural resources, habitats and watersheds. In keeping with our mission, we find many reasons to oppose the commercial density and scale in the Planning Board's draft master plan for Gaithersburg West, in particular the plan for the Life Sciences Center (LSC).

Ginny Barnes, Environmental Chair, West Montgomery County Citizens Association (WMCCA): On behalf of the WMCCA membership, I wish to reaffirm our opposition to the scale of planned development for Belward Farm and the associated Gaithersburg West community. We believe the massive development planned to support 40,000 new residents will result in the degradation of infrastructure and environmental resources in the western county as thousands of vehicles bleed off from the new development and into the supporting network of roads, some of which are rustic and/or pass through special protection areas.

Ethan Goffman, Sierra Club: Gaithersburg West is a hastily conceived project that seems designed to accommodate Johns Hopkins University, rather than part of a thoughtful plan to accommodate the region's natural growth and serve all of its citizens. It is Smart Growth in name only.

Housing Opportunities Commission: We are aware of the vision of a life sciences and medical service center in this master plan area. Retail and office businesses are also expected. These businesses will offer many jobs with below median pay. Given the job-rich nature of the I-270 Corridor, even those with incomes at or above the median will find it hard to live in the area. Demand which exceeds supply will increase the cost of housing, reducing further the share of employees who can afford to live near the LSC.

Bragi Valgeirsson, The Gaithersburg - North Potomac - Rockville Coalition: In the end this not about science this is about corporate welfare. It's about JHU asking us to foot the bill for their real estate speculation. Contrary to what we have been told taxpayers will see no benefits from this plan, we are subsidizing it. It clearly favors JHU but offers nothing to the county. This is not a good deal for us.

What we need to do is go back to the Planning Board and come up with a plan that it more balanced, offers real benefits to the county, does not require taxpayers to subsidize this effort, has in place strict mitigation for traffic, and allows the biotech industry to flourish.

North Potomac Citizens Association, North Potomac Periodical, Spring 2009: Johns Hopkins University (JHU) has proposed building one of the largest bio-tech centers in the country here in the North Potomac/Gaithersburg/Rockville area. Formally known as the Life Science Center, this "Science City" could include up to 20 million square feet of commercial, academic and residential development. This is more density than downtown Bethesda and National Institutes of Health, combined. Concerned communities and organizations like NPCA are excited about the prospect of a vibrant and world-class bio-tech center in the area. However, we oppose the traffic, overcrowding of schools, congestion and density that the proposed city would bring to the area.

President's Letter – by Liza Wilson Durant, PhD, West Montgomery County Citizens Association, October 2009: There is a compromise, I think – an opportunity to find middle ground among the stakeholders, but there is much work yet to be done and particularly on the sustainability aspect of the plan. I am optimistic that our leaders won't let our neighbors in Gaithersburg down. But we here in Potomac will be watching closely, as the quality of our life is as much at stake as theirs.

Action Committee for Transit, February 28, 2010: The Gaithersburg West plan, on the other hand, county taxpayers will spend \$525 million on roads and highways and ask for an additional \$1.3 billion from the state, for a total of almost \$2 billion from general transportation revenue. Not only will this use up money that ought to be spent on expanding transit, it will potentially block new sources of transportation revenue, such as an increase in the gas tax, since opponents will be able to frame them as a subsidy to developers of sprawl. Further, much of this \$2 billion will go towards road widening and high-speed highways with cloverleaf intersections, which will make it impossible to achieve the avowed goal of creating a transit-oriented community. The six-lane and eight-lane highways and overpasses will divide Gaithersburg West into isolated pods. And within the pods, there are too few streets – a suburban office-park design that will discourage walking and transit use and inconvenience drivers too. To get from one part of Gaithersburg West to another, you will either take a long walk to a giant garage and get into a car, or else wait for an infrequent, heavily-subsidized circulator bus. This sounds a lot like Tysons Corner – which Fairfax County is currently spending an enormous amount of money to fix.

Mary Reardon, Montgomery Preservation, Inc.: The new campus should be part of the farm, not the other way around. In diagrams of the Hopkins plan, the farmstead resembles token green space in some down-county mega-project. Belward Farm's entire 107 acres has been judged eligible for the National Register, and that was the original environmental setting in the County's historic designation.

David Hauck, Sierra Club, February 17, 2010: The Montgomery County Group of the Sierra Club is developing a scorecard of Council votes over the last four years. This scorecard will be an important element as we decide on our endorsements for Council in the 2010 elections.

The scorecard is unfinished but we want to alert you to one issue that will weigh heavily on our endorsements. This issue, the Life Sciences Center within the Gaithersburg West master plan, will come to you for decisions within the next few months.

Dan Drazan, President, North Potomac Citizen's Association, March 9, 2010: 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.

I caution you 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.

**North Potomac Citizens Association
Montgomery Countryside Alliance
Residents for Reasonable Development
West Montgomery County Citizens Association
Gaithersburg - North Potomac - Rockville Coalition
Darnestown Civic Association
Montgomery Preservation, Inc.**

October 19, 2009

We oppose the draft Gaithersburg West Master Plan because it:

- Provides unprecedented density that will dramatically worsen traffic and congestion for tens of thousands of residents.
- Promotes development on Belward Farm that is incompatible with its historic setting, and with surrounding residential communities.
- Permits unprecedented construction that will create pressure on rural areas to absorb additional development and density.
- Lacks effective staging requirements. Existing loopholes allow a great deal of commercial and residential construction to be built prior to the completion of necessary infrastructure.

...no one can rule out that the 2010 at-large election could be decided by a couple thousand votes or less. **One large, organized single-interest group could make a difference.**

So, to answer our own question: is Gaithersburg West a sleeping giant in 2010? It's too early to say for sure, but it will certainly be a factor. Adam Pagnucco, Maryland Politics Watch