



**Gaithersburg West Master Plan, Montgomery County Council, Sept. 17, 2009**

My name is Mary Reardon. I'm a board member of Montgomery Preservation Inc. – MPI – the only countywide nonprofit historic preservation organization. The mission of MPI is to preserve, protect, and promote the County's rich architectural heritage and historic landscapes.

MPI is particularly concerned about the fate of Belward Farm, a property eligible for the National Register of Historic Places, and designated as a County historic resource. But first, the Gaithersburg West plan in general calls for far too much development, is hastily conceived, obviously tailored to Johns Hopkins Real Estate, and will forever transform one of the most beautiful parts of our County. I hope that Hopkins is planning substantial research on respiratory diseases, because the people who live and work in the area are going to need it, given the traffic this plan would generate.

Belward Farm is a gem, a farm that predates the Civil War and a farmstead that predates the 20<sup>th</sup> century, with mature trees in and around the farmstead. Belward Farm is one of the reasons county residents take pride in our heritage.

MPI supports the Gaithersburg -North Potomac–Rockville Coalition in its effort to protect Belward Farm. The coalition has developed a sensible, sensitive alternative to the proposed plans for the site, taking into account the needs of Johns Hopkins, the community, and the environment. MPI agrees on the following points:

- New development on Belward Farm should have a density of no more than 1.2 million square feet. Johns Hopkins' high density complex should be built at LSC Central. (And we hope that TDRs are considered in this regard.)

- Buildings on the farm must be compatible in height and style to the farm and to surrounding neighborhoods. Buildings nearest the historic farmstead should be no more than three stories.

- The Corridor Cities Transitway should not traverse Belward Farm.

- The contours of the land, a key feature of the farm, should be preserved and integrated into the design. It would be criminal to level this beautiful landscape.

- The farm's historic buildings should be sensitively adapted for modern use.

Like the coalition, MPI welcomes a research or education campus on the farm site. But the coalition's vision of a minimally intrusive campus will respect the integrity of the farm and preserve the site for the enjoyment of researchers, students, and the community.

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. That setting was reduced to a paltry 7 acres in 1996. The Planning Board's current recommendation of a 10- to 12-acre setting is an improvement, but still paltry. MPI strongly urges that the environmental setting be at least 25 acres.

The Historic Preservation Commission – HPC – has pointed out that among the significant features of the environmental setting are “the vistas of the farmstead from the south, east, and west.” Passersby – county residents and visitors – should be able to see the farmstead and to recognize it as a farm. The size of the environmental setting, the height of new buildings, and the overall density should be at levels that preserve the vision and character of this historic resource.

Bear in mind that the HPC will review proposed changes to this site when a project plan is presented. And if state or Federal funding or permits are involved in the transitway or

the proposed project, then Maryland Historical Trust will be involved in mitigating adverse impacts on the farm via a Section 106 review.

Finally, I want to remind Johns Hopkins, and the Council, of a major precept of the medical profession: “First, do no harm.” Here, that should apply to a treasured historic resource and the surrounding community.