

Rockville mayor criticizes Science City plan

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Rockville Mayor Phyllis Marcuccio is asking Montgomery County leaders to assuage her city's concerns that the proposed "Science City" development in nearby Gaithersburg will be a traffic catastrophe for the area.

"The city of Rockville continues to have concerns ... which we believe must be addressed in order to ensure that the quality of life for those near the planning area is at the high level that Rockville citizens expect and deserve," the letter says.

Advocates of Science City, led by officials at Johns Hopkins University, want to build a massive biotech center, with up to 60,000 employees working in what had been farmland just a few years ago.

Among other concerns, Marcuccio says she is worried that:

- » The entrance to Interstate 270 at Route 28, "already highly overburdened," will be shut down by traffic;
- » Planners haven't studied the traffic effect on arterials and secondary roads in Rockville such as Wootton Parkway, Fallsgover Boulevard, Blackwell Road and Watt Branch Parkway;
- » The expanded Corridor Cities Transitway, which is supposed to pass through Rockville in the King Farm neighborhood, may not receive state funding;
- » There aren't enough minimal requirements to preserve open space in the Science City campus.

Critics, many of whom say they support an investment in biotech development, are worried that the development is too much, too soon for a region that doesn't have proper mass transit and is already crushed by traffic congestion.

Marcuccio's letter has drawn support from former County Council President Phil Andrews, D-Gaithersburg, who appended his own memo to Marcuccio's note asking for "a point by point" response.

Andrews has vowed to scale back Hopkins' plans for Science City.

"This is the issue that affects the most people in the most serious way in my District," Andrews told *The Examiner*. "It's a very high priority of mine to insure that the draft master plan is not approved."

Hopkins spokeswoman Robin Ferrier didn't respond to requests for comment.

Science City boosters were gratified last month when the County Council voted to run a light rail line along the expanded I-270, which theoretically would allow tens of thousands of extra commuters to flock to proposed development.

Marcuccio's letter suggests that the battle may not be over.

"The primary problem -- the most serious problem in the vicinity of the Gaithersburg West area -- is traffic congestion. And the draft Gaithersburg West master plan would make it considerably worse," Andrews said. "So it needs to be revised. Because otherwise the quality of life of thousands and thousands of people will deteriorate."

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