

My name is Donna Baron and I represent The Gaithersburg – North Potomac – Rockville Coalition, a group of more than 200 neighbors and the numbers are growing.

First, let me emphasize that we are not against growth in the biomedical field, however, there are many aspects of the Gaithersburg West master plan creating the “Science City” that make little sense to us—the most obvious example being the plans for Belward Farm.

Johns Hopkins Real Estate wants to build a high-rise commercial complex with housing and retail for 14,000 people in the middle of our established suburban residential community--against the expressed wishes of the community and Ms. Banks, the former owner of the farm.

This development will be adjacent to the most congested intersection in Montgomery County, and the planned CCT will intersect the farm and have to make a left turn at that intersection. The density proposed for the farm, one of the most beautiful pieces of property in the county will be on par with city blocks near Metro downtown and make it look like Rosslyn.

The zoning changes will allow for 40,000 additional workers for a total of 60,000 workers in the Science City and will create massive traffic problems. Yet there are no substantive improvements scheduled for I-270 or the already gridlocked area where the traffic from Rt 28 enters and exits 270. Instead, what’s proposed are the CCT, which is expected to carry, at best, 15% of the workforce, and several ugly and expensive “grade separated interchanges”.

In addition, 5,000 housing units are being proposed for an area that is already solid housing, bringing thousands of additional children to our already overcrowded schools. Some of the schools have used trailers as classrooms for almost 20 years! And the housing will not be staged with the development, so there is every expectation that the housing will be full before the development takes place.

The members of the Coalition believe that honesty, open communication and a strict set of priorities will be required to fix this master plan in its current form. The reality is that we live in a “transportationally-challenged” area with cul de sacs that discourage the use of mass transit and force all the traffic onto a few, highly congested roads. We are not against future development in the Life Sciences area but we are against the wanton destruction of our most beloved landmark. And we insist that all future development be on scale with and maintain the character of our quiet suburban residential neighborhoods.

We insist on a having a seat the table with developers and county planners to have a say in what happens to our community.

Thank you in advance for your consideration of our concerns.