

Hello, I am Donna Baron, Coordinator of the Gaithersburg - North Potomac - Rockville Coalition and Scale-it-Back.com. We are a coalition of over 400 individuals, civic associations and homeowners' associations. Scale-it-back.com has been operational less than three months and we've already had well over 7500 page views.

Johns Hopkins would like for you to think we are just a few old NIMBYs who want to block progress. However, we represent a full range of ages and a cross-section of occupations including hospital personnel, scientists and the owners of biotechnology companies. We have a shared vision for our community. We moved to our communities for the trees, the green space and the suburban lifestyle. If we wanted to live in downtown Silver Spring or Tysons Corner, we would have moved there. And we expect that any development will be respectful of and compatible with our established residential neighborhoods.

Belward Farm is not appropriate for a high-rise commercial complex, not now, not in 30 years...not ever. It is surrounded by residential neighborhoods that were designed and built with dead-end streets that end in cul-de-sacs. The residents cannot get out of their subdivisions without their cars so the area, by design, will never be transit-oriented and will never be able to handle the outrageous traffic you are proposing. Besides, Johns Hopkins purchased the farm for a fraction of its value, based on promises made to the former owner. It is imperative that they honor those promises to establish a minimally intrusive educational or medical campus to carry on the legacy of the farm.

Planning Board Commissioner Alfandre said the plan for Belward Farm will "suck the economic engine out of the Science City". We agree and recommend that the "economic engine" and the highest density remain in LSC Central for the biomedical organizations and in LSC North for the commercial companies.

The Corridor Cities Transitway is touted as mass-transit that will handle the huge increases in density. However, it is estimated to carry only about 12 – 15% of the additional 50,000 workers and residents, leaving 85% or tens of thousands of additional cars on the roads which will bury us in traffic. We fully support the expansion of the hospital and the biomedical organizations; however, we feel that the density must be reduced by at least one-third to alleviate the overwhelming congestion.

The residents have very valid concerns about the master plan and should not be considered collateral damage in the race for revenue. It's up to you to cut through the marketing rhetoric, recognize this for what it is and rewrite the master plan so it makes sense for the residents as well as the corporate interests.

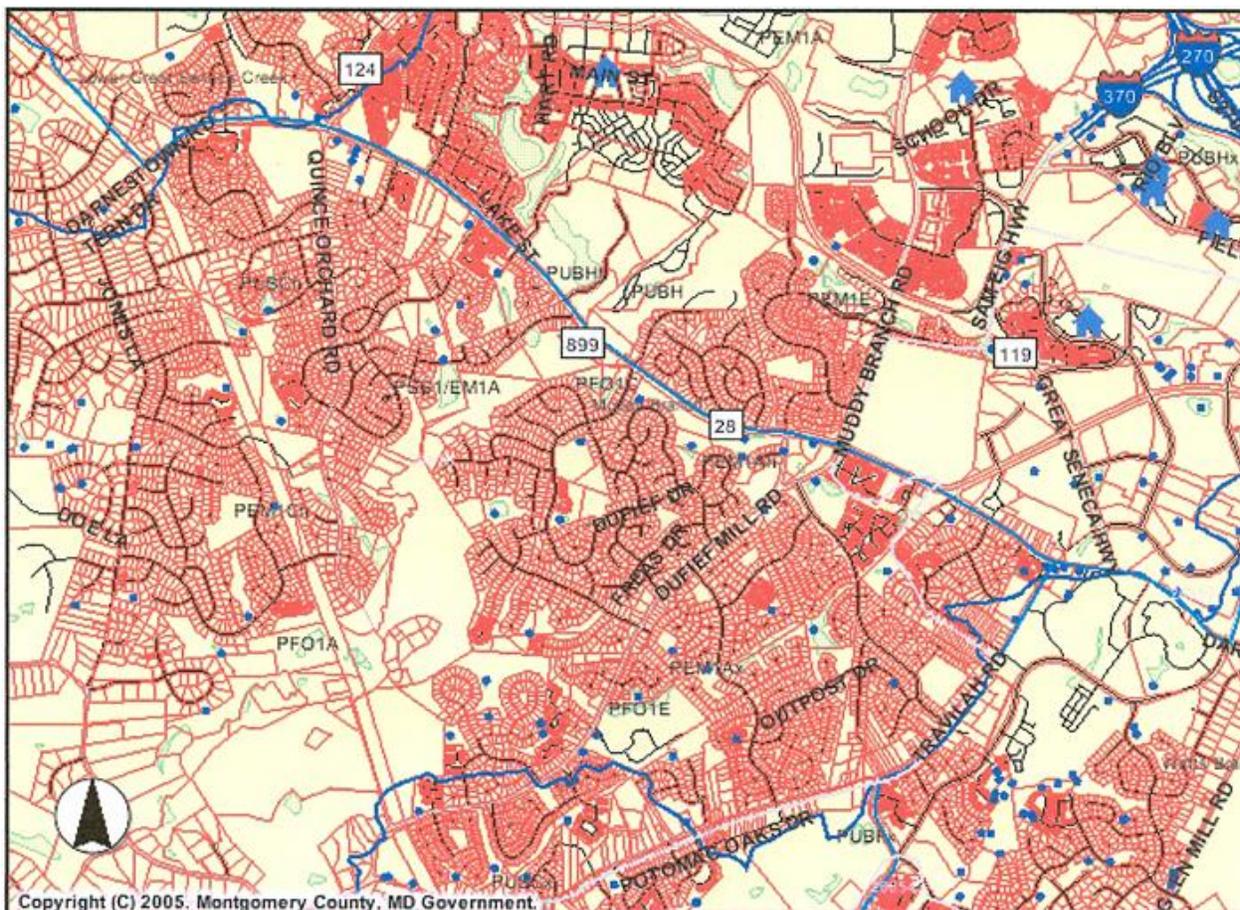
Thank you and please scale-it-back.

I am attaching additional background information and recommendations as part of my written testimony.

The Gaithersburg West Master Plan: Issues and Recommendations

Overview:

The problems in our area are obvious. Our roads are at or above capacity. Many of our intersections are failing. The intersection at Muddy Branch Road and Great Seneca Highway is one of the most congested intersections in Montgomery County. We are five miles from the nearest Metro station. Most of the subdivisions have dead-end streets with cul-de-sacs and limited access to secondary roads. The secondary roads funnel the traffic onto a few heavily traveled highways. As a result, this area is almost completely auto-dependent and there is little hope for substantial use of transit because the residents cannot get out of their subdivisions without their cars. The Planning Board and the developers have built the area, parcel by parcel, into an auto-dependant community and it is unlikely that it will ever be transit-oriented. This is our reality.



We support the expansion of the biomedical community but at a lower density and with a different configuration than is proposed in the master plan. Our recommendations:

- The zoning should be changed for Belward Farm to prevent anything other than a minimally intrusive educational or medical campus reserving a large open green space for the community.

- Johns Hopkins must be limited to the remaining 1.2 million square feet or less for Belward Farm and buildings should be no more than 50 feet high. Buildings adjacent to the historic farmstead should be no more than three stories in height.
- The highest density and tallest buildings, the “economic engine” of the Science City, should be on LSC Central and LSC North; however the overall density should be reduced by one-third.
- A stringent set of staging requirements regarding transportation improvements and housing need to be developed.
- A reassessment of the housing should be done to maintain the integrity of LSC Central.
- The Corridor Cities Transit (CCT) should be under construction before commercial construction begins. The alignment should be altered, as it was on Route 355, to run up the middle of Great Seneca Highway to minimize the destruction in the established residential areas. Also, the original alignment with two stops above Key West Avenue should be used.
- The CCT must not traverse Belward Farm.
- The density must be reduced to lessen the need for six- and eight-lane highways and ten- and twelve-lane multilevel interchanges which are incompatible with our residential community.
- Compatibility with the historic farmstead and the adjacent neighborhoods must be of paramount importance in the development of Belward Farm.

Belward Farm

As you can see from the map on the previous page, Belward Farm (the open square next to the words “Muddy Branch”) will never be appropriate for a large commercial development because it will always be surrounded by residential subdivisions. Any additional traffic, let alone 15,000 to 40,000 additional cars will cause gridlock on the roads and the people who live in the subdivisions will not be able to get out onto the secondary roads.

We strongly recommend that the zoning for Belward Farm be changed to limit the property to a minimally intrusive educational or medical campus reserving a large portion for green space...ideally open green space incorporating walking paths for the community. If the density is reduced temporarily, we will be faced with this same battle in six or eight years when JHU requests a higher density...and we will do battle. As I said in my oral testimony, Belward Farm is not and never will be an appropriate location for a high-rise high-density commercial complex for 15,000 people. It is adjacent to, and always will be adjacent to, three residential neighborhoods. Johns Hopkins clearly has no regard for the surrounding communities and it is single-minded about getting as much density as possible regardless of the detrimental effects on the community.

Also, the enormous high-rise complex currently proposed by Johns Hopkins Real Estate with the crushing density of the commercial space, as well as the housing, retail and other undisclosed uses, will not honor the wishes of the former owner, Elizabeth Banks,

or carry on the legacy of Belward Farm. Although the obligatory historic easement has been set aside, Johns Hopkins is using the accommodating language, “and related purposes” in the deed, to nullify the essential purpose of the deed restrictions.

Johns Hopkins’ current plans for Belward Farm show that their own buildings will occupy only about 30 of the 107 acres. The rest of the space would be for their “collaborative partners” or speculative building. Their collaborative partners should be encouraged to establish their presence on LSC Central as well. This would put the density and the “economic engine” where it belongs, in Life Sciences Central.

Transportation:

The proposed alignment for the Corridor Cities Transitway (CCT) would be a traffic and personal disaster for our communities. The proposed alignment, for the most part, would be built along existing roads adjacent to neighborhoods and would require that the roads be widened in order to accommodate it. This will result in the loss of homes, community amenities, and tree buffers. There will be significant noise pollution in areas near existing housing...especially since the CCT will be very close to the housing once the roads are widened. Many of the neighborhoods will have railroad-style gates installed across their entrances to allow the CCT to pass every three to six minutes.

Since the CCT is only expected to carry 12-15% of the additional population, at least 85% of the extra people will be in their cars. This will result in over 40,000 additional cars on the roads in and around the “transit oriented development”. In order to accommodate the tens of thousands of extra cars, some of the area roads would be widened to six and eight lanes.

We recommend that the Corridor Cities Transitway be recognized for what it is...a useful addition to the current transit options, rather than the magic carpet that is going to solve the proposed traffic nightmares. Also, if the CCT is built, the original alignment should be used, altering it so the alignment runs up the center of Great Seneca Highway. The CCT must **NOT** traverse Belward Farm.

Two equally offensive “solutions” for the overwhelming traffic around the Muddy Branch Road/Great Seneca Highway area are being proposed. One is a twelve-lane multilevel highway interchange at the corner of Muddy Branch Road and Great Seneca Highway for the Corridor Cities Transitway and the traffic generated by the 15,000 people proposed for Belward Farm. This interchange is surrounded by four established residential neighborhoods resulting in the loss of housing and the reconfiguration of neighborhoods.

The second solution was proposed recently by County Executive Ike Leggett who proposed that Sam Eig Highway be extended into Belward Farm. This is problematic for two reasons:

1. If Sam Eig is brought directly into Belward Farm it would be confirmation that the highest density would be built on the farm...sucking the “economic engine” out of the Science City and completely ignoring the opposition of the surrounding residential neighborhoods.
2. It would require that twelve single-family homes in the Mission Hills subdivision be destroyed. The remaining homes would then be sandwiched between two six-lane highways with the possibility of railroad-style gates across the entrance to their subdivision if the CCT traverses Belward Farm. This is similar to Johns Hopkins’ tactics in Baltimore when they bought homes near their campus, let them deteriorate to a point that they could justify tearing them down. And then their expansion could begin.

The area residents are highly opposed to having the CCT traverse the length of the Belward Farm. It will further desecrate the farm by allowing the tallest buildings behind the historic farmstead. Additionally, it will cause havoc for the residents at the intersections of Midsummer Drive and Mission Hill Drive and would further complicate and congest the intersection at Muddy Branch Road and Great Seneca Highway.

The “Science City”:

The “Science City”, aka the “Shady Grove Science Center”, is being billed as an idyllic walkable-bikeable family place where children will frolic. This hyperbole might be described as putting lipstick on a pig. The Science City is actually five different areas with high-density development, separated by six- and eight-lane highways.

The “linear parks”, which are about the only green spaces shown on the plans, are actually the median strips on Key West Avenue, an eight-lane highway. The “LSC Loop” will be a series of roads that will have 20 intersections and will cross the eight-lane highway twice and the six-lane highway twice.

The Smart Growth advocates have said the blocks created by the few cross streets, added to accommodate more buildings, will be too big to be walkable. These same cross-streets, billed as a “grid pattern”, will supposedly reduce the traffic. If the cars still need to go in and out onto the same six- and eight-lane highways, how does that reduce the traffic?

The “urban forests” are the weed-trees and brush that have grown along the side of the highways. The centerpiece for the Science City will be one of the ten- or twelve-lane multilevel highway interchanges. Hardly walkable or bikeable and certainly not idyllic.

The “Science City” is the Shady Grove Life Sciences Center dressed up with inflated marketing rhetoric in order to make it sound “world-class”. It is essentially a boondoggle to allow Johns Hopkins Real Estate to build their massive commercial complex for 15,000 people on Belward Farm. Please recognize it for what it is.

LSC West (the Public Services Training Academy site):

If the PSTA is moved, this area would be an appropriate location for a fire station and an elementary school on a standard size school lot. We highly recommend that the ball fields, children's play areas as well as the two rectangular fields now being proposed for Belward Farm be located here because of the proximity to the school and the housing, as well as the proper topography of the land.

The jobs/housing ration figures used in the Master Plan were calculated using three small pockets of housing even though there are presently over 25,000 homes within 2.4 miles of the Life Sciences area and over 2,000 additional homes have been approved for Crown Farm. An accurate analysis of all of the housing surrounding the Life Sciences Center must be done to determine a realistic amount of additional housing to be built on the PSTA and in the rest of the "Science City".

Excess housing will cause additional congestion and further overcrowding in the schools. Since the housing is not included in the staging, there is no assurance that any of the people who live in the housing will work in the LSC. Also, there is every expectation that many of the people who move to the housing will do so to attend the Wootton Cluster schools which are already overcrowded and have used trailers as classrooms for years. The amount of housing must be accurately reevaluated and the housing construction must be staged to coincide with the commercial development.

Staging:

According to the Master Plan, "In addition to the ADFO (Adequate Public Facilities Ordinance) standards, this Plan recommends staging to ensure that **infrastructure is in place before development is allowed to proceed**". And "The Plan provides stages and amounts of development that are tied to the CCT's funding, construction and operation to **ensure that transit is available as development proceeds.**"

Johns Hopkins Real Estate was previously approved for 1.2 million square feet on Belward and the proposed master plan would bring that up to 4.6 million square feet...which incidentally is 20% more square feet of office space than the Pentagon! They have been planning their commercial complex since 1989 so presumably they will be waiting at the ready for the triggers that would allow them to grab any and all square footage as it becomes available. It appears that they would be able to build their entire operation before the CCT is even started!

Stage 1 allows for 8.2 million sq ft of commercial space, which is "existing and pipeline", plus an additional 400,000 square feet.

Johns Hopkins is presumably well along in the planning process, so they will likely scoop up the incremental 400,000 square feet which would give them 1.6 million square feet. They plan to start building within three years.

As soon as the prerequisites for Stage 2 have been met, essentially the **funding** of the CCT from the Shady Grove Metro to Metropolitan Grove and a five percent increase in non-driver mode share, another 2.8 million square feet will become available which would magically provide them with 4.4 million square feet. They would likely top it off to 4.6 million square feet by using unused square footage from companies whose preliminary plans have expired. This would allow them to complete their commercial complex on the farm to accommodate 15,000 people...regardless of whether the CCT is ever built.

At that point, Johns Hopkins Real Estate would have exactly what they want. To quote one of the Smart Growth blogs, they would have a “cash cow” to finance their operations in Baltimore. And we will be left with the mess and the county would be playing “catch up” with the massive amount of infrastructure that would be required to handle the crushing traffic.

Zoning:

The wording included in the proposed LSC and CR zones is an insult to the residents. The zone descriptions are clearly written to give the developers the maximum amount of flexibility without giving the residents any predictability whatsoever.

Further, it is difficult for area residents to comment on possible impact of the use of the CR mixed-use zone on the former Public Safety Training Academy site, since the zone does not yet exist and the Council has yet to consider the enabling legislation.

We recommend that both the staging requirements and the zoning be thoroughly examined in the interest of creating more certainty and predictability for the residents. Both are entirely too flexible for the developers and do not give the residents any sense that they will know what will be built, when or where, or to ensure the infrastructure actually is in place to handle the additional traffic.

The integrity of LSC Central must be maintained by requiring a very high percentage of biomedical uses in the LSC zone. Diluting the area with housing and retail would reduce the amount of space available for the biomedical organizations which should be the central focus for this area.

Additionally, there should be strong emphasis on ensuring **compatibility** with the surrounding neighborhoods. Much has been written by the Planning Board about the importance of compatibility in other projects but this concept has been completely ignored in this massive project.

Moving Forward:

If 20 million square feet of commercial space is built in the “Science City”, it will absorb much of the market demand for quality jobs for skilled workers from the rest of Montgomery County. To relieve some of the congestion on the western side of I-270

and balance the job market across the county, we strongly recommend that the job density in the Science City be reduced by at least one-third and a portion of the job opportunities planned for the "Science City" be shifted to the eastern side of the county near the FDA and the East County Center for Science and Technology where the infrastructure is already in place and the land is waiting for jobs.

This would decrease the pressure on our already highly congested roads, reduce the outrageous costs for massive amounts of new infrastructure, help prevent the destruction of our neighborhoods and it would fulfill the county's promises to the residents of the eastern portion of the county.

We, the members of the Gaithersburg - North Potomac - Rockville Coalition, hope these recommendations will serve as the foundation for a revision of the proposed master plan that would start with the reality in our community, examine the current problems, and work to solve those problems while improving the community rather than destroying it. We believe that our proposed changes to the current plan would protect our neighborhoods, create traffic relief, work toward balancing the opportunities for skilled workers across the county and provide a framework for the **sensible** expansion of the biomedical organizations.

Thank you for your consideration.

Donna Baron

The Gaithersburg - North Potomac - Rockville Coalition

www.scale-it-back.com