

Testimony – Planning Board Public Hearing on I-270 – Corridor Cities Transitway

First, let me debunk the core premise of the Gaithersburg West Master Plan. It is a fallacy to think that the Shady Grove Life Sciences Center and the surrounding area could be transformed into a “transit-oriented development” able to accommodate 40,000 new workers and the residents from 5,000 new housing units simply by adding the Corridor Cities Transitway (CCT).

In a bit of circular reasoning, the CCT is being used to transform the Shady Grove Life Sciences Center into a “transit-oriented development” called the “Science City”. However, the proposed master plan will add thousands of people to the “Science City” in order to secure funding for the CCT. And because the CCT is only expected to carry about 15% of the population, for every thousand people who are added to the Science City, 850 of them will still be in their cars. This will result in over 42,000 additional cars on our highly congested roads.

How can 42,000 more cars, a few cross streets within the “Science City” and huge highways with multi-level highway interchanges immediately adjacent to the Science City create a “transit-oriented development”, even if there is a rapid bus running through it? The CCT, while a worthy project, cannot be used as justification for the impact of adding 42,000 cars to our community.

Our part of the county has large parcels of land surrounded by highways, and mile after mile of subdivisions with dead-end streets, cul-de-sacs and limited access to two-lane secondary roads. The Planning Board, over the past 40 years, has created an auto-dependant suburb. There is little hope that the residents will ever be able to use transit in any form without first driving to a station because they must use their cars to get out of the subdivision. Since the CCT will have limited parking, few area residents will be able to use it.

The theory is that by destroying our community to justify the CCT, the people upcounty might be able to get to the Shady Grove Metro more quickly. And some of the 40,000 additional workers might ride the CCT to work in the “Science City”.

Johns Hopkins Real Estate is using the “Science City” and the CCT to justify building a high-rise monstrosity for 15,000 people on Belward Farm, despite their promises to the former owner, and in spite of deed restrictions they accepted when they purchased the farm for a fraction of its value. Even though Belward Farm is in the middle of an established suburban residential neighborhood, the commercial complex will have the density of a downtown area near a Metro Station, yet the farm is five miles from the nearest Metro.

The Gaithersburg West Master Plan must be rewritten in an honest, straight-forward and transparent manner to reflect sensible and appropriate growth that is in scale with the community, and that will respect and maintain the character of Belward Farm.

To quote Royce Hanson, Chairman of the Planning Board, “Development of great centers need not occur at the expense of existing communities.”

Thank you.

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