

A Blueprint Out of Character

Montgomery County's blueprint for the development of 800 acres in western Gaithersburg ignores the deed of a lifelong resident of the county: Elizabeth Banks. When Banks deeded her cherished Belward Farm, which is within the boundaries of the master plan, to Johns Hopkins University in 1989, she trusted this institution to support her vision for Belward as a research campus.

Banks was a feisty lady who fought to ensure that plans for the property would not include housing and commercial establishments. Preservation of the character of the land, not money, was her motivation. The 138-acre farm, which had been in her family since the late 1800s, was deeded to Johns Hopkins for \$5 million, much less than the estimated \$40 million that could have been received if the land had been sold to developers.

The deed stated that after her death the land would be used for "agricultural, academic, research and development, delivery of health and medical care and services, or related purposes only." It was not long after Banks passed away in 2005 at the age of 93, and when the plans for the Gaithersburg West Master Plan were underway, that the intent of the deed was ignored. Today, Johns Hopkins and the Montgomery County Park and Planning Commission (MCPPC) are proposing 300 housing units and commercial establishments in Belward.

It is not too late for Johns Hopkins and the MCPPC to maintain the character that Elizabeth Banks intended for Belward.

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