



## Montgomery County Group

### Statement on Proposed West Gaithersburg Life Sciences Center

Gaithersburg West is a hastily conceived project that seems designed to accommodate Johns Hopkins University, rather than part of a thoughtful plan to accommodate the region's natural growth and serve all of its citizens. It is Smart Growth in name only.

Before beginning a new plan, it makes sense to look at the entire region. What are its transportation assets? Which are stressed to the maximum and which are capable of handling growth? Where are the jobs located, where are the residences, and how can more balance be encouraged between the two?

The planners have done none of that. Currently, most jobs are in the western part of Montgomery County, with Rockville Pike, I-270 and the Shady Grove arm of the red line stressed to the maximum. Commuters come from the East toward Bethesda and Rockville. To shorten commute times it makes sense to encourage job creation on the Glenmont arm of the Red Line, along the future route of the Purple Line, for instance in Langley Park, and on such Green Line stations as College Park and Prince Georges Plaza. Much of this would require coordinating with Prince George's County, realizing that the whole DC Metro area acts as an organic unit.

Instead the Gaithersburg West plan replicates the mistakes of the past while conjuring up an imaginary future. In Rollin Stanley's recent talk before the Sierra Club and the League of Women Voters, he justified Gaithersburg West as a long-term form of Smart Growth to create space for the many people who are inevitably coming to Montgomery County. Why, then, is the development job based, when jobs are what bring more people to the area? Gaithersburg West will create growth where it's least desirable, not handle growth that's coming anyway. It will do so in an awkward and unnatural place, then reroute the Corridor Cities Transitway and claim that that makes it a Smart Growth project.

The Life Sciences Center would be the **largest employment center** in Montgomery County. If it reached 60,000 jobs, it would exceed downtown Bethesda (40,000 in 2030), White Flint plan (40,000), downtown Silver Spring (34,000 in 2030) or equal downtown Bethesda plus the NIH (currently about 58,000). It is on the outer edge of the I-270 development corridor, actually protruding into the Potomac planning area (the wedge).

The Life Sciences Center is called transit oriented, yet traffic modeling shows a much higher growth in driving trips than transit trips. If the proposed urban center were built, transit work trips would increase by about 7000 compared to the trips under the current master plan. Auto work trips would increase by 30,000. The impact on I-270 would be greater than the impact on the CCT. Some 2000 more work trips would come from Montgomery County's rural area.

Traffic congestion would become much worse, according to the modeling results in the plan's transportation appendix. That should not be the bottom line for a smart growth, transit oriented sustainable plan!

So if you want to balance growth and jobs and do it near the city center and places with the best transit access, why create jobs in an outer suburb to the west along a corridor that already has an excess of jobs?

While we do not believe this project should go forward, if it must do so a better plan is available. Gaithersburg residents, in conjunction with the Sierra Club, have devised an alternative "Reasonable Plan" that would allow for a smaller biotech business center positioned closer to transit. However, even this plan is too much for this nearly-exurban area.

In sum, this plan has been put together too hastily and imposed from above. Too often, the county pays lip service to the terms "public input" and "Smart Growth," but satisfies neither.

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