

THE GAITHERSBURG WEST MASTER PLAN AND THE SCIENCE CITY

COMMUNITY ISSUES AND CONCERNS

The Gaithersburg – North Potomac – Rockville Coalition supports biomedical research and expects further development of the life sciences area. However, we expect this expansion to proceed responsibly with recognition of the limitations posed by the configuration of the existing roads and subdivisions and it must be compatible with the existing neighborhoods.

The addition of 40,000 to 50,000 people to an area that is about one square mile, surrounded by already congested roads and overcrowded schools, without a clear plan to mitigate the effect of this expansion is irresponsible.

There are many factors that must be addressed honestly and completely before this plan can be considered responsible smart growth.

- Building a high-rise city, surrounded by six and eight lane highways with highway interchanges, in the middle of a suburban residential community is totally incompatible with the existing neighborhoods.
- Our area will never be truly urban or transit-oriented because developers have built subdivisions with cul de sacs and limited exits, ensuring the area will always be auto-dependent, regardless of the negative issues related to auto-dependence.
- The crushing density of the Science City will further overcrowd the schools, gridlock the roads and there are no real amenities planned for current residents.
- The CCT will never carry enough capacity to mitigate the resulting traffic and we are five miles from the nearest Metro.
- Belward Farm is our most beloved landmark and has a strong “sense of place” for the community and must be the focal point for the development rather than something to fence off and work around.
- Johns Hopkins Real Estate, the commercial organizations, the commercial real estate developers and venture capitalists support the project because there is money to be made in high-density, high-rise commercial office complexes.
- The taxpayers would pay for the major portion of the infrastructure and the developers and corporations would make the money.
- The Science City is an unworkable proposition and the Gaithersburg West master plan needs serious revision.

The master plan proposes extensive expansion of the Science City area as if the resulting traffic and additional population will not affect the surrounding residential neighborhoods, schools and neighboring jurisdictions when in fact it will have profound effects that must be considered before moving forward.

Donna H. Baron

The Gaithersburg – North Potomac – Rockville Coalition

www.scale-it-back.com

THE SCIENCE CITY – COMMUNITY ISSUES AND CONCERNS

<p>Urban vs. Suburban</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The proposed Science City is surrounded by suburban residential subdivisions, many with cul de sacs and single exits that funnel all the traffic onto a few highly congested roads. There are almost no cross-streets within the neighborhoods. Even though the neighborhoods are walkable, there is very little opportunity to walk outside many of the neighborhoods. • The few cross streets planned for the Science City will do little to alleviate congestion because all of the traffic will travel on the highly congested roads going to and from the Science City.
<p>Transportation and “transit-oriented” design</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The job density proposed for the Science City is that of an urban area near a Metro but we are five miles from the Metro. The impact of transit on the neighborhoods will be negligible, and will do little to mitigate the traffic from the Science City. • The Corridor Cities Transit (CCT) would be a nice addition but it will most likely be a bus which will carry about 15% of the workforce. With the addition of 40,000 workers plus the population from the 5,000 housing units there could be 35,000 to 45,000 additional vehicles, depending on the end results of the CCT and the housing. • Most residents must drive to get out of their neighborhoods and parking will be limited at CCT stations. Few of the current residents will ride the CCT because most stops are too far from existing residential areas. • The current alignment for the CCT will run through the Belward Farm, out onto Muddy Branch Road, cross the road and make a left turn at the most congested intersection in the county, Seneca and Muddy Branch Rd. • The roads within the area will be widened to six and eight lanes with five grade-separated interchanges similar to the massive and costly interchanges on Rt 29 near the Montgomery Auto Sales Park near White Oak. • Plans for improving I-270 are uncertain and the roads near some of the 270 entrances are not scheduled for improvement so a smooth transition from local roads to I-270 will be impossible. • The traffic from the Science City will cause gridlock on the secondary roads like Dufief Mill Rd, Travilah, Wootton Parkway, Glen Mill Rd, Shady Grove extended, and Piney Meetinghouse. Getting out of the driveways and intersections that line these roads will be impossible. • The cost of widening the roads and building the interchanges will be incredibly costly and the taxpayers will pick up most of the cost. • If the Science City was truly “transit-oriented”, these massive highways and interchanges would not be necessary, and gridlock would not be a threat.
<p>Walkable – Bikeable</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Walking and biking may be possible within each area of the Science City but the six and eight-lane highways with interchanges will hinder most attempts to bike or walk to the Science City. • Biking or walking on secondary roads in our area is dangerous because the roads are hilly, some lack shoulders and cars illegally use the bike lanes to pass turning vehicles.
<p>The LSC Loop</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The LSC Loop will cross the eight lane highway twice, the six lane highway twice, and there will be a total of twenty intersections or interchanges along the way.

<p>Building heights</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The commercial buildings in the area are currently two to five stories. The proposed buildings, some of which are planned near residential areas, will be five to twelve stories and will be incompatible with the nearby neighborhoods. • The high-rise buildings on Belward Farm will dwarf the historic farmstead and will be incompatible with the character of the pristine, 100 year old Civil War era farm. • Biotechnology companies generally expand laterally because of the size and weight of the equipment they use and are not likely to occupy the high-rise buildings.
<p>Housing</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The amount of housing that was deemed necessary to balance the jobs/housing ratio was arbitrary and was calculated on three small developments with a total of 3,262 homes. However, the area that surrounds the Science City is almost solid housing and has over 25,000 homes within 2.4 miles. • The housing is not included in the staging so there is no assurance that any of the residents of the housing will work in the Science City.
<p>Schools</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The dwelling units will most likely be purchased by people who want their children to attend the schools in the Wootton cluster, however, Wootton HS is overcrowded and has held classes in trailers for at least fifteen years. • The high school on Crown Farm is not expected to be built any time soon. • The elementary school on the Public Services Training Academy will be built “if necessary”. • While some housing might be beneficial, an overabundance of additional housing will further crowd the schools and will not necessarily provide housing for the Science City workers.
<p>Belward</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Belward Farm is our most beloved landmark and has a strong “sense of place” for the community. • The farm was sold to Johns Hopkins for \$5 million, much below its \$40 million value, with the understanding that Johns Hopkins would continue the legacy of the farm with an academic or medical campus. • The proposed high-density, high-rise commercial development is incompatible and does not live up to the spirit of Ms. Banks’ wishes even if it is within JHU’s interpretation of the legal parameters of the deed. • The issues regarding animal testing, stem cell research and hazardous substances have not been addressed and nothing has been said about fencing, guard houses or security.
<p>Zoning</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The proposed zoning is much more flexible and there will be more opportunity, once it is put into place, for developers to get approval for projects that might be incompatible with the surrounding neighborhoods.
<p>Community input</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meetings were held by Johns Hopkins Real Estate and the Planning Board. Concerns were expressed and suggestions were given by the community. Yet the resulting draft master plan reflected very little accommodation of those concerns or suggestions. • The timetable for approval of the master plan is compressed and rushed. As a result, many residents in our area are still unaware of the profound impact the current proposed master plan and the resulting development will have on our neighborhoods and schools.

Smart Growth

Principles of Smart Growth

Adapted from Smart Growth Online, A Service of the Smart Growth Network www.smartgrowth.org

Reflected to a degree in the current master plan:

- Create Range of Housing Opportunities and Choices
Providing quality housing for people of all income levels is an integral component in any smart growth strategy.
- Mix Land Uses
Smart growth supports the integration of mixed land uses into communities as a critical component of achieving better places to live.
- Provide a Variety of Transportation Choices
Providing people with more choices in housing, shopping, communities, and transportation is a key aim of smart growth.
- Take Advantage of Compact Building Design
Smart growth provides a means for communities to incorporate more compact building design as an alternative to conventional, land consumptive development.

Not reflected in the current master plan:

- Create Walkable Neighborhoods
Walkable communities are desirable places to live, work, learn, worship and play, and therefore a key component of smart growth.
- Encourage Community and Stakeholder Collaboration
Growth can create great places to live, work and play -- *if it responds to a community's own sense of how and where it wants to grow.*
- Foster Distinctive, Attractive Communities with a Strong Sense of Place
Smart growth encourages communities to craft a vision and set standards for development and construction *which respond to community values of architectural beauty and distinctiveness*, as well as expanded choices in housing and transportation.
- Make Development Decisions Predictable, Fair and Cost Effective
For a community to be successful in implementing smart growth, *it must be embraced by the private sector.*
- Preserve Open Space, Farmland, Natural Beauty and Critical Environmental Areas
Open space preservation supports smart growth goals by bolstering local economies, preserving critical environmental areas, improving our communities' quality of life, and guiding new growth into existing communities.
- Strengthen and Direct Development Towards Existing Communities
Smart growth directs development towards existing communities *already served by infrastructure*, seeking to utilize the resources that existing neighborhoods offer, and conserve open space and irreplaceable natural resources on the urban fringe.