



Jeffrey Z. Slavin  
Mayor

## TOWN OF SOMERSET

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Rich Charnovich  
Town Manager/Clerk-Treasurer

May 12, 2015

Honorable Casey Anderson  
Chairman, Montgomery County Planning Board, and Commissioners  
8787 Georgia Avenue  
Silver Spring, MD 20910

Dear Chairman Anderson and Commissioners:

At its May 4, 2015 meeting the Somerset Town Council voted to have me send a letter to tell you how our community feels about the vision the Staff presented on April 30<sup>th</sup> for the Westbard Sector Plan. During the planning process, the Staff has listened to and incorporated many suggestions from community groups, and we appreciate their willingness to work with us. However, we want you to be aware of the issues that are still of major concern.

At the top of our list of concerns is the increased density that is proposed in the plan and the excessively tall buildings that would create such an increase. The plan proposes almost tripling the existing number of residential units from 1,104 to 3,200. The 3,200 units nearly doubles what is currently allowed (1,684). With this dramatic change in density, we anticipate that schools in our area will become overcrowded and the volume of traffic will explode.

We are aware of the plans to open a new B-CC cluster middle school in 2017 and the proposed addition to B-CC High School that same year, depending on the availability of funds. Such plans to increase capacity should ease the current strain on our overcrowded schools. However, these changes do not address the real problem that could be triggered by high-density development at Westbard, that there is no more room to build because the elementary school sites are small and the B-CC High School site will be completely built out. Accordingly, one of the options that the Staff identified to deal with an increasing number of students from new units in Westbard -- a potential boundary change that moves all of the Westbard new housing units into the B-CC cluster -- is of particular alarm to us because of the potential for major overcrowding in our cluster.

Our residents are also concerned about traffic, especially on Dorset Avenue, which is the one road that traverses our Town. Over the years Somerset has instituted traffic calming measures

*"Where People Have Deep Roots and Grow Strong"*

such as reducing the speed limit to 20 miles per hour and installing speed humps to slow traffic and protect children walking to Somerset Elementary school, as well as to discourage cut-thru traffic. However, residents are worried that any additional housing units and retail space will add to already overwhelming traffic. Shortly, we will be reviewing the traffic study that informed the results the Staff presented to you on 4/30, and that said that 6 intersections would be within acceptable thresholds. We hope that this study also has data on the intersection of Dorset Avenue and Little Falls Parkway, something we asked for during the planning process and were told by the Staff that the study would include. We will be writing you again once we have looked at the county's data in detail.

The section of River Road in the Westbard Sector Plan presents safety hazards for users because of multiple curb cuts and is visually unattractive, in contrast to the sections of River Road on either side of the Sector Plan. We are concerned about the proposed 75 foot building heights and do not want a "canyon" along River Road. River Road north of Ridgefield and south of Little Falls is single-family homes, so lower heights and significant setbacks seem to fit better with the surrounding area.

We appreciate the Staff's consideration of the plan that Catholic University developed for the land along Westbard Avenue and for the potential River Road Boulevard. Somerset is an active member of the Citizens Coordinating Committee on Friendship Heights, which funded this study, and we think it contains many good ideas.

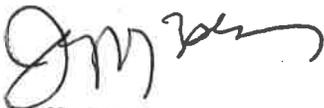
We want to commend the Staff's recommendations for townhouses near the communities of Springfield, Kenwood, Westwood Mews and Westbard Mews and the retention of a significant amount of light industrial zoning, which will continue to provide neighborhood services such as auto repairs.

We also want to commend the Staff's vision of River Road with wider, pedestrian-friendly sidewalks, a green buffer with trees, safe bike lanes, and a narrow median strip.

We appreciate the Staff's vision of Willett Branch being day lighted and providing an amenity for the community.

We look forward to continuing to participate in the development of the New Westbard Sector Plan and appreciate the opportunity to comment on its strengths, as well as areas that we would like to see improved.

Sincerely,



Jeffrey Z. Slavin  
Mayor