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Mayor



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Rich Charnovich
Town Manager/Clerk-Treasurer

Statement of Marnie S. Shaul, Council Vice-President, Town of Somerset

Chairman Casey Anderson and Planning Board Members,

Like our mayor, I find many elements of the draft plan to be exciting opportunities for those of us who live in the Westbard area. However, it's very important that the entire vision of the plan be realized, not just what private property owners propose to do.

Somerset wants this plan to be more successful in the public realm than the 1982 plan. As this plan points out, "the 1982 Plan's design concepts for improving the public realm remain largely unrealized" because "they were not funded by the County's Capital Improvements Program (CIP) and/or the market did not make major redevelopment feasible". The 1982 vision included green spaces, the creation of a boulevard on River Road and improving the water quality of the Willett Branch. More than 30 years later, these same projects are important elements of the draft plan's vision, but just like the 1982 Plan, they will not happen without CIP funds or significant developer contributions. These projects are amenities that make redevelopment of Westbard worthwhile for our residents. Therefore, mechanisms must be developed to stage both private and public investment.

The draft plan envisions reducing reliance on automobiles by increasing reliance on other transportation modes. It says that bike and transit improvements and mixed-use zoning should provide a reduction in vehicle trips over the maximum development currently allowed. The plan's emphasis on bikeways and bike share stations and improved bus service with a transit hub with a real-time information display are welcome alternatives to the automobile. Shuttle service to the metro is also important for reducing reliance on cars. However, to ensure that traffic remains at the level envisioned in the plan, these alternatives to cars need to be funded and staged.

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

One option for making transportation and other public investments a reality is to put them in the County's CIP when the Westbard Plan is considered by the County Council.

Another option is to append a Memorandum of Understanding to the Westbard plan that requires the County and/or developers to commit funding toward construction of these important plan elements at stages during development--for example at every 250 dwelling units or every 100,000 square feet of retail. These funds would go toward non-motorized transit improvements, daylighting of the Willett Branch, changing River Road to a boulevard and providing green space.

It is critical that mechanisms be developed during this plan approval process so that the entire vision of Westbard redevelopment occurs, and residents in Westbard and neighboring communities get the full benefit of the Plan's vision.

Thank you.