

# Citizens Coordinating Committee on Friendship Heights

April 25, 2016

Council President Floreen, Councilmembers Berliner,  
Elrich, Hucker, Katz, Leventhal, Navarro, Rice and Riemer  
and Ms. Michaelson and Mr. Orlin  
Montgomery County Council  
100 Maryland Avenue  
Rockville, MD 20850

Re: Westbard Sector Plan

Dear Council President Floreen, Councilmembers, Ms. Michaelson and Mr. Orlin:

Representatives of the Citizens Coordinating Committee on Friendship Heights (CCCFH) thank you for all you have done on the Westbard Sector Plan. We appreciate how Ms. Michaelson and Mr. Orlin provided information to the County Council that ultimately has made the draft Plan a better document, one that is closer to the vision the residents favor.

We understand that there is interest in comments where the language in the draft Resolution of April 15, 2016 and draft Plan could be clearer in conveying the Council's intent when it took a straw vote in March. We are listing these below. Our response particularly seeks clarity about building heights and amenities, which ultimately will be very important in how well developments fulfill the vision of the Plan.

## PRESERVATION OF LOCAL RETAIL

With reference to the second bullet on the right side of Page 18 of the Plan and Page 4 of the draft Resolution, lines 154 - 156, we prefer this to read as follows: "This sector plan is not appropriate for combination retail stores, and large single tenant retail stores, not including a grocery store or health club, may be restricted at time of regulatory review based on compatibility with the surrounding communities." We believe this language is more in keeping with the neighborhood scale of the Plan's vision.

## HOUSING POLICY

With reference to Page 22 of the Plan and Pages 4-5 of the draft Resolution, the new Section entitled 2.2 Affordable Housing, lines 170-200, includes extensive new language concerning housing policy that appears inappropriate for the Westbard Sector Plan and, in addition, has never been vetted and commented on by the public. We believe the Council's discussion addressed Westbard specifically, not county-wide policy. While CCCFH supports the Council's decision on affordable housing with respect to Westbard, the new language raises issues that

**Representing the Citizens Associations of Brookdale, Chevy Chase Village, Chevy Chase West,  
Drummond, Glen Echo Heights, Green Acres-Glen Cove, Kenwood, Kenwood Condominium, Kenwood House Cooperative,  
Kenwood Place Condominium, Mohican Hills, Somerset, Springfield, Sumner, Sumner Village Condominium, Westmoreland,  
Westbard Mews, Westwood Mews, and Wood Acres**

would be added at the last minute without citizen input or comment. This language should be deleted and addressed in a county-wide housing policy.

## DISTRIBUTION OF AFFORDABLE HOUSING AND HEIGHTS

As recognized in the Council discussions of the Plan, affordable housing should be distributed across all new residential buildings, and not disproportionately located in one or more buildings. This should be specified in the Plan (*but see* draft Resolution Pages 5 (line 228) and 20 (line 902), which may be read to be inconsistent with this). With reference to the last paragraph of Page 5 of the draft Resolution, CCCFH believes that affordable housing should be located in approximately the same percentages on each site (throughout owner Sites 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5). On the Westwood Tower/HOC site (Site 4), the new building(s) should not have relatively low percentages of affordable housing, with the existing building having relatively high percentages, to give an overall amount that is numerically acceptable.

In addition, we support the Council's mandate of 15% affordable housing on these sites (1 through 5), but we oppose adding any additional height that would raise the maximum heights already adopted in the Council's straw vote. This is particularly applicable to Sites 2 (Manor Care), 4 (Westwood Tower/HOC), and 5 (Bowlmor). We have previously commented on the already high height on Site 3 (Westwood II).

As to Site 6 (Park Bethesda), that height is firmly limited and will not increase based on the requirement for affordable housing. Also, consistent with the discussion above, the new Park Bethesda building(s) should not have relatively low percentages of affordable housing, with the existing building having relatively high percentages, to give a 25% overall amount.

## HEIGHTS FROM TRANSFERS

With reference to Page 19 of the draft Resolution under Site 5 - Bowlmor Site, the language states the maximum height will be 110 feet, but the subsequent language may be read to imply that this maximum can be raised by transferring density from Site 1. See Page 20 lines 902-907 and Page 5 lines 228-230). This makes the specification of a maximum height of 110 feet meaningless. CCCFH opposes any increase in height at this site above the 110 foot height limit.

## AMENITIES AND AFFORDABLE HOUSING

With reference to page 88 of the draft Plan, addressed at page 38 of the draft Resolution, CCCFH believes that the Council's decision to mandate 15% of housing development to be affordable housing means that affordable housing is no longer an amenity because it has become a legal requirement (e.g., Page 2 line 70 says "Require" and Page 5 line 223 says "mandates"). The central vision of the plan has been that the primary amenity will be the naturalization of the Willett Branch. See draft Plan Pages 6, 8, 10, 43, 46, 49, 64-66, 70-71, 75, 80 – 81. In addition, the draft Plan refers to parks, trails and open space. See sections 3.1.2, 3.2.2, 3.3.2, 3.4.2. Westward residents urge that the Willett Branch naturalization remain the primary amenity of the Plan. An amenity should be something that enhances the area for residents and surrounding neighborhoods (such as the naturalization of the Willett Branch, parks, civic green, and open

space), greatly improving the quality of life. If affordable housing is allowed to be counted as an amenity, the prospects for Willett Branch could diminish significantly. What's more, parks, and open space for children could be adversely impacted.

#### WASHINGTON EPISCOPAL SCHOOL

With reference to the Washington Episcopal School (Site 9, addressed on pages 30-31 of the draft resolution, Norman Knopf, on behalf of CCCFH, has submitted under separate cover a letter addressing the issue of access to Washington Episcopal School. That letter is incorporated here by reference.

CCCFH also offers the following more general comments beyond specific language changes.

#### TRANSIT SERVICE

With reference to Page 35 of the draft Plan, the first full paragraph on the right side beginning "Transit service that is frequent..." CCCFH urges that you delete the following words: "and, if possible, branches into the nearby communities". We have grave concerns about additional traffic in the surrounding communities and urge that additional public transportation should be limited to main thoroughfares.

#### ROOFTOP TERRACE AND HEIGHT

CCCFH understands that the rooftop terrace and height issue will be addressed in a separate amendment to the zoning ordinance. We support a change that any rooftop terrace does not increase the maximum height.

#### STAGING

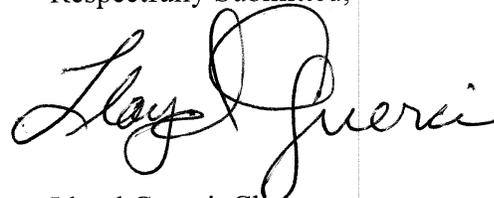
People who live in our area have expressed concern about how development will affect our schools and cut-through traffic. Although the Plan attempts to answer that concern, we continue to believe that residents would feel more reassured if the Council included language about staging--having periodic checkpoints to be sure that the growth in students and traffic is being matched with necessary infrastructure. If the planners are right, development can continue as planned, but, if not, neighborhoods must feel that they have some degree of protection.

#### FINANCING OF AMENITIES

Finally, CCCFH wants to reiterate how important we believe it is to have assured financing mechanisms for the amenities in this Plan. We recommend that development be tied to the public amenities listed in the plan, especially naturalization of the Willett Branch, and that an amenity fund be created to which developers should contribute. We also reiterate our support for the County Council to put funds in its Capital Improvements Program (CIP) to finance bikeways, to purchase parkland, and to make improvements to River Road.

CCCFH appreciates the opportunity to provide comments and looks forward to continuing to work with the Council on this and other matters in the future.

Respectfully Submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Lloyd Guerci". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, prominent initial "L".

Lloyd Guerci, Chair  
Citizens Coordinating Committee on  
Friendship Heights