



Jeffrey Z. Slavin
Mayor

TOWN OF SOMERSET

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Rich Charnovich
Town Manager/Clerk-Treasurer

March 12, 2019

Casey Anderson, Chair
Montgomery County Planning Board
8787 Georgia Avenue
Silver Spring, MD 20910

Re: Westwood Shopping Center, #820180190, #120170170

Dear Chair Anderson: *Casey*

On March 4, 2019, the Somerset Town Council voted to send you a letter about the plan before you on the Westwood Shopping Center. We find that this version of the plan is much improved from earlier plans we have reviewed, and we thank the staff of the Planning Department and other county agencies who have worked with Regency Centers to obtain these improvements.

The Westbard Sector Plan envisioned the Willett Branch Greenway as a regional gem in the Montgomery County park and trail system (page 100 of the Westbard Sector Plan). This is an amenity that all the surrounding communities support. So we are pleased that Regency has agreed to dedicate several parcels of land for the Greenway and for pedestrian access to the Greenway. We hope that the Board will ensure that all the needed land is conveyed as early as possible. We are also pleased that Regency has agreed to contribute \$500,000 to the Montgomery County Department of Parks for the planning, design and implementation of the Willett Branch Greenway. We support the schedule for conveyance of the funds prior to the Use and Occupancy Certificate for the Commercial Building as specified on page 35 of the Planning Department Report and hope the Board confirms this date.

One element we would like the Board to pay particular attention to and which staff does not address is reserving space for small, local, and independent retailers. This is an element cited in the Sector Plan (p.19). The current small businesses such as the pet store, the toy store, the framing store, and hair salon are popular with area residents. The former developer, Equity One, made a commitment to the County Council to maintain reasonable rents for current small businesses—their rents would increase only by inflation. There is no mention of this in the current plan. *"Where People and Trees Have Deep Roots and Grow Strong"*

We would also like to highlight safety and traffic concerns. We understand that additional signals aren't currently supported by the signal warrant study, but over time traffic on Westbard Avenue will increase. Somerset children walk and bike to Westland Middle School. Families go back and forth across Westbard Avenue, and we want to have sufficient traffic lights for their safe passage. The current plan has only one traffic signal—at the civic green. With the proposed realignment of Westbard Avenue and the elimination of the current traffic signal, at least one more traffic signal is needed to protect pedestrians and bikers, preferably at the reconfigured intersection of Westbard Avenue and Ridgefield, which will promote safer neighborhood access. Staff comments (page 37) indicate that the Applicant will be responsible for reevaluating signal warrants as the project goes forward. We would like the Board to ensure that periodic traffic studies be done as more and more development is added to the area.

Also, regarding traffic, we want to support a well-functioning transit hub. A transit hub is indicated on the plan and should be implemented as soon as practicable so that public transit is an easy choice for those using, and those eventually living in, the Westwood Shopping Center.

There has been much discussion about the treatment of storm water during the development of the plan and, while we are pleased to see improvements in the plan, we are disappointed that suggestions made by the Little Falls Watershed Alliance (LFWA) have not been fully incorporated. If the Willett Branch Greenway is to function as a stream, it needs ground water. So to the extent possible we want more of the water generated on the site infiltrated into the ground. We are concerned that a waiver has been granted for most of the water on Westbard Avenue. This means that dirty water will be flowing directly into the Willett Branch. This is not in compliance with the Sector Plan. According to the Plan (page 58), stormwater management should be done on-site wherever feasible, and the use of waivers should be limited.

In previous plans the Civic Green was developed during Phase 2, but in this current version of the plan, it is shown in Phase 3. That means that it will be many, many years before residents and visitors to the area will have an attractive place to gather. This important amenity should be provided earlier in the development of the site.

Finally, there is uncertainty about the other major green space—Springfield Park. We understand that negotiations are underway to place a neighborhood park where it is currently shown on the plan. However, if the negotiations fail, it is critical that a new park of the same size be located on the Westwood I site.

The Westwood Plan has been years in the making. We look forward to improvements in the area and to significant amenities for nearby residents.

Sincerely,


Jeffrey Z. Slavin
Mayor

cc: Town of Somerset Council