

Friends of White Flint

Promoting a Sustainable, Walkable, and Engaging Community

P.O. Box 2222, White Flint Station, Kensington, MD 20891-2222 301-984-1200

February 27, 2010

The Hon. Nancy Floreen
President
And the Montgomery County Council
100 Maryland Ave.
Rockville, MD 20850

RE: COUNCIL CONSIDERATION OF WHITE FLINT SECTOR PLAN

Dear Mrs. Floreen and Councilmembers:

As the Council begins its consideration of its Committees' recommendations on the White Flint Sector Plan, we want to thank all Councilmembers, those on the Committees and those who have also participated, for their support of the White Flint Sector Plan, and urge final adoption of the Plan.

Friends of White Flint strongly supports the White Flint Sector Plan.

Friends of White Flint is, as you know, made up of residents, businesses, and property owners in the White Flint area, who together promote a sustainable, walkable and engaging community in White Flint. FoWF Members include the largest community organizations, employers, businesses, and property owners in the White Flint area, who are represented evenly on our Board of Directors. Our co-Chairs, for example, include Evan Goldman from the White Flint Partnership and Suzanne Hudson from the White Flint Community Coalition.

Last October, FoWF delivered a 50-page report to the Council on the Planning Board's draft Plan. http://blog.friendsofwhiteflint.org/oneclick_uploads/2009/10/wfsp-statement-final.pdf. The Report strongly supported the Plan, but added twelve recommendations for specific actions to improve the draft Plan.

We are pleased that the Planning, Housing and Economic Development Committee has recommended adoption of a number of those recommendations, including: accelerating staging improvements, particularly in the "core" of the Sector; increasing the size of the Civic Green park; bicycle- and pedestrian-friendly engineering for all projects, including those still in planning; and grandfathering rights for those already in the development process. In addition, the PHED and Management and Fiscal Policy Committees are working diligently on two of our other recommendations: creating a dedicated and reliable funding mechanism, including an analysis of a parking district. Finally, on February 23rd, the Council clarified the MARC commuter rail station location by accepting the Nicholson Court site.

There are, however, a few matters remaining which the Council should address:

A. Declare Rockville Pike a Transit/Transportation Priority: The new White Flint is intended to be a transit-oriented community, and the Committees have been diligent in addressing this question. Yet the Council has not yet acted on FoWF's request to declare Rockville Pike a transit/transportation priority. (P. 41 of the Report.) This declaration would permit FoWF and other organizations to press for the state and federal funding needed for the renovation of Rockville Pike.

The Council should declare Rockville Pike a transit/transportation priority.

B. Clarification of Support for Inter-generational Center: The FoWF Report recommended an inter-generational center for the Sector (P. 41 of the Report), and suggested, for efficiency and to leverage other facilities, that it be combined with new facilities at Wall Park. This recommendation was developed with, and supported by, AARP of Maryland, which testified in favor of the recommendation at the public hearings.

Yet the staff memorandum (P. 6 of Agenda Item 4B, Feb. 19, 2010) says:

The Council received testimony asking that a senior center [*sic*] be recommended in the Sector Plan. It is the County's policy, as previously approved by the Council, not to develop individual Senior Centers in the future. The Recreation Facility Development Plan indicates the following:

The philosophy of the Department is not to promote specialized facilities to serve specific age groups, but to develop a sufficient number of facilities that are sized and designed with proper versatility to serve all age groups near the communities where they live.

Moreover, the County, at the urging of the Council and the Commission on Aging, determined that the best approach was to have senior programming at facilities that serve the entire community rather than serving seniors in single purpose facilities and contributing to the isolation experienced by some seniors.

This is a misunderstanding of the role of public community facilities in an area such as White Flint, where the projected demographics will provide an ideal environment for the interaction of different generations. The purpose of an inter-generational center is expressly the opposite of "isolation," and the concept was developed precisely because of such concerns in the past.

Perhaps this was a misunderstanding that the focus of a "senior center" would be recreation. This is not the point of an inter-generational center, which focuses more on civic, rather than physical, activities. This misunderstanding was heightened when the staff memo recommended adding a few couches and a Starbucks to the proposed Regional Services Center to "provide a community destination point that might otherwise be provided by the facilities requested in testimony." Even if the staff's recommendation was intended to be sensitive and

cost-effective, the net result is exactly the opposite. This is an innovative Plan and should not use outmoded concepts of seniors or their involvement in the community.

The Council should clarify that one of the community amenities expected in the White Flint Sector is a center dedicated to leveraging available resources for the benefit of all generations, including both the young and the mature. If those services are expected to be provided by the Regional Services Center, the Plan should so state. The Council should not adopt Plan language which substitutes couches and coffee for the services which can help stimulate an inter-generational sense of community beyond that provided by a library and a rec center.

The Council should add language proposing an “inter-generational center” to the community amenities in the Plan.

C. Begin Community Compatibility Efforts Immediately: The FoWF Report recommended specific community compatibility efforts be started in Phase One of the Plan (P. 43 of the Report). At its hearing on February 24, 2010, the PHED Committee decided to include language strengthening “neighborhood protection.” The language is not yet prepared. The Committee discussion, however, seemed to be limited to some physical improvements, which are needed, but if the language were limited to just describing types of protections, it would miss the point of the FoWF recommendation.

Neither the Planning Board’s nor the PHED Committee’s staging plan discussed **when** these community improvements would begin. In part, this seemed to be because of a focus on new developments in the southern portion of the Sector. The FoWF Report recommended that these efforts, though tied to particular projects in some cases, not be limited to just one part of the Sector and, more importantly, begin in Phase One of the Plan. Community compatibility efforts will be required throughout the Sector, and many of those could begin soon after enactment of the Plan.

The Council should include community compatibility efforts throughout the staging of the Plan, beginning in Phase One.

D. Maple Avenue District Road Extension: The FoWF Report recommended a new road be planned to break up and activate the single remaining “super-block” in the Sector, in the northeastern portion of the Sector in the “Maple Avenue District.” (P. 46 of the Report.) This new road would connect Rockville Pike to the new “Gateway” project. Here is the map from the FoWF Report showing, in yellow, the proposed new road (and the super-block it would break up):



The ostensible reason for not including this new proposed road in the past had been a concern about the surrounding landowners' opposition. But as noted in the FoWF Report, by last October, Friends of White Flint had secured property owners' support for the proposal. This support was reinforced by the PHED Committee's recommendation to support the ability of the Forum Condominium to adopt the New Urbanism zoning available near the Metro Station.

The Council should reserve a new road extension in the Maple Avenue District to break up the last remaining super-block in the Sector.

E. New Schools: The PHED Committee, after much discussion, recommended a new school site in an existing parking lot south of White Flint Mall, with an alternate site further northwest. This recommendation satisfies half of the FoWF Report recommendation for a school site in the Sector (Pp. 46-49 of the Report). It does not, however, address the other portion of the Report's recommendation: to address the urgent needs of the Randolph Hill community to the east of the Sector.

Randolph Hills is an essential part of the White Flint area, yet has been historically under-served. Its local schools are significantly over-crowded, even though there is a 17-acre under-used site at the former Rocking Horse Elementary School location in the heart of the neighborhood. The Planning Board, recognizing both the connection and the need, recommended developing a school at the Rocking Horse site. The Council staff's position was that this was not an issue which should be treated in the White Flint Sector Plan. Nevertheless, both the connection and the need remain.

The Council should commit to addressing the school over-crowding issue in the Randolph Hills community.

The preceding discussion of our few remaining issues should not be taken as a criticism of the Council, Committees, or staff. All have been diligent and hard-working on this exceeding complex and innovative Plan. Nevertheless, we believe that the Council should address these five remaining improvements in the Plan.

This letter was prepared after a unanimous vote of the FoWF Board at its meeting on February 26, 2010, and has been offered for public comment under our regular policy.

To repeat our recommendations:

A. Declare Rockville Pike a Transit/Transportation Priority:

The Council should declare Rockville Pike a transit/transportation priority.

B. Clarification of Support for Inter-generational Center:

The Council should add language proposing an “inter-generational center” to the community amenities in the Plan.

C. Begin Community Compatibility Efforts Immediately:

The Council should include community compatibility efforts throughout the staging of the Plan, beginning in Phase One.

D. Maple Avenue District Road Extension:

The Council should reserve a new road extension in the Maple Avenue District to break up the last remaining super-block in the Sector.

E. New Schools:

The Council should commit to addressing the school over-crowding issue in the Randolph Hills community.

And most important: **The Council should adopt the White Flint Sector Plan.**

Thank you for your attention and your leadership on this important Plan.

Sincerely,

Barnaby Zall
Co-Chair for Business
Friends of White Flint