

July 16, 2009

Mr. Chairman:

Thank you for allowing me an explanation of my dissenting vote.

When I came “on Board,” a year ago, we were in the midst of Gaithersburg West. I was excited to be a part of this, and with the promise of a Life Sciences Center “Science City.” After reading, study, thought, site visits, and public discussion, I came to the conclusion the Master Plan was flawed. My intuitive conclusion of the proposed Plan is one of water spilling helter-skelter across a flat surface rather than a concentration of new growth into a vibrant, “City Center.” Rather than a “Science City,” the plan recommends a series of “Science Villages.” I have serious concerns with this. Simply mixing increased volumes of housing and retail capacity with the unique employment niche of the LSC; spreading it around into multiple village centers does nothing to increase the numbers of LSC businesses here. It continues giving preference funding to short-term road capacity, impacting momentum for the nascent BRT system and threatens state support for keeping the current CCT alignment. We have the same problem of diluting development of the “Center” as we have in the Germantown plan. There is more reason to ensure this doesn’t happen in Gaithersburg West.

The flaw is the failure to recognize where the “City Center” is. It lies within the confluence of the DANAC and NASD properties on the north side of Key West “Boulevard,” (LSC North) and the RICA, JHU/MCC properties on the south side (upper LSC Central). These properties are efficiently served by the Current Corridor City Transitway and Stations. New land uses as proposed in the plan on these “in-fill” properties provide critical mass density that will be built more quickly. Their new zoning category differences inject immediate diversity, making it easier for the CR, LSC, MXN zones to complement one another because there is more “there” to work with. I don’t accept the argument that disparate landowners instead of raw land under one ownership make this harder to pull off. These are “collections” of a few parcels controlled by developers who have incentives in their respective CR, LSC, and MXN zones to collaborate on creating the “City Center.” This is the best chance for getting a Life “Science City” magnet in place in the shortest amount of time.

As demand for Life Science businesses increases, then adjacent villages must be allowed to expeditiously be brought “on line” to seamlessly meet it. The PTSA site and the JHU Belward site are speculative developments. Under the plan sent to the County Council, they will dilute the “Science City” by cannibalizing tenants, services, and funding. CCT loops and stations can be added to these village centers as Life Science business demand dictates.

Respectfully,

Joe Alfandre, Commissioner