

DOUGLAS B. FARQUHAR
SANDY SPRING, MARYLAND 20860

February 23, 2021

Submitted by electronic transmission

Montgomery County Council

Re: Ashton Village Center Sector Plan

Dear President, Vice-President, and Members of the Montgomery County Council,

As a resident of nearby Sandy Spring, I write to ask the County Council to make several critical changes to the Ashton Village Center Sector Plan you will consider at a public hearing on March 2, 2021.

I fully support the positions of the Sandy Spring Ashton Rural Preservation Consortium and the Sandy Spring Civic Association expressed in other letters that have been or will be sent to you. Specifically, the County Council should:

- reduce the maximum height of buildings on the Southeast Corner of the Ashton intersection by 5 feet to 40 feet.
- reduce the density of buildings permitted on about half of the Southeast Corner from a FAR of .50 to a FAR of .25. (specifically, lots not currently zoned with a commercial density FAR of .75 should be placed in a zone with a FAR of .25, to permit less density on the portions of the 9-acre SE Corner that are farther from the intersection).
- instruct the Planning Board to ensure that the community-based Implementation Advisory Committee is granted effective ability to review, comment on, and make recommendations about proposed development plans (the Committee should be involved at the conceptual design phase, before developer plans become final).
- Convert design guidelines into design requirements.

I write separately to add several points.

First, as to the heights permitted on the Southeast Corner, the Planning Staff said, in a communication I have seen, that they viewed a 5' increase in the maximum height they proposed maximum height for the Southeast Corner (the Planning Board raised it from 40' to 45') as being insignificant. Here is the problem: the Planning Board has, for two other nearby developments, also viewed an increase in maximum height from 35' to 40' as being insignificant, leading to previous approvals of townhouses as high as three and a half stories (meaning the top level is a loft) to now being a full four stories. You

are now being asked to approve buildings as tall as four and half stories on a corner that is supposed to keep its rural character, and which is surrounded by buildings that are nearly all only one story tall. Existing homes throughout the area are mostly two or three stories and nearby commercial buildings, with few exceptions, are one story. The 5' increase in height is not insignificant, but it is colossal when coupled with the 5' earlier-labeled "insignificant" increase in buildings heights already imposed on the area. There are no buildings approaching 45' in height anywhere near Ashton. The closest one, Manor Fair Hill Farm senior living center, in Olney, is pictured below.



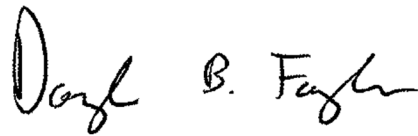
This is hardly in keeping with a small, rural village.

Second, you may wonder why you should not defer to the Planning Board on the height, zoning, and community input issues. The answer is that the Planning Board has changed, and now appears unwilling to stand up to developers and their attorneys, especially when the attorney for the developer is Francoise Carrier, the former Chair of the Planning Board (the same developer and attorney responsible for successfully advocating for the extremely dense and ugly recent developments called Thomas Village, in Sandy Spring, and Ashton Market, in Ashton). This has not always been the case. Back in 2007, the Planning Board rejected a proposed huge mostly commercial development (actually, less dense than what the developer is seeking now) proposed by the same developer for the same corner of the Ashton intersection, due to community

opposition. The community opposition to the intense development proposed now is just as strong. But the Planning Board, while paying lip service to maintaining rural character, is overly pliant to the developer's wishes.

Area residents appreciate the independent view and control that you can bring to this subject matter, to keep our small, still mostly rural community from becoming Olney or Glenmont, areas that are closer to mass transit, employment centers, and sustainable transportation corridors.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Douglas B. Farquhar". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Douglas B. Farquhar

cc: Claire Iseli, Special Assistant to County Executive Marc Elrich