



Sandy Spring Civic Association

www.sandyspringcivic.com

*Meeting the second Monday of each month, 6:30pm at the Ross Boddy Community Center
located on Brooke Road in Sandy Spring, Maryland*

February 23, 2021

To the Chair and Members of the Montgomery County Council,

We write on behalf of the Sandy Spring Civic Association, the oldest racially integrated Civic Association in Montgomery County, to ask that you revise portions of the Ashton Village Center Sector Plan that the County Planning Board has recommended that you approve.

Our community met, repeatedly, with County Planning staff members and flooded the Planning Board with letters urging that the Plan permit reasonable development, consistent with the rural character of our neighborhoods, and preserve the rural character of Ashton. We strongly believe that four aspects of the proposed plan need to be revised to achieve these goals, before passage by the County Council.

First, the **maximum height of buildings on the Southeast Corner of the Ashton intersection should be reduced by 5' to 40.'** As submitted to the Council, the Plan currently would permit buildings as high as 45', with design *guidelines* (not *requirements*) recommending that buildings that high only be placed at the Ashton intersection or on the interior of the site, where they would be less visible from the street. A 45' height limit would permit four story buildings (even four and a half story buildings, which are four story buildings plus a loft). However, there are no four story buildings currently in Ashton. Four-story buildings are incompatible with a small rural village, as most homes and commercial buildings in the area are no more than three stories. Four and a half story buildings would be even more antithetical to a rural look.

Second, the **density of buildings permitted on about half of the Southeast Corner should be reduced to a FAR of .25 from a FAR of .50.** Specifically, the County Council should reduce the FAR to .25 on SE Corner lots not currently zoned with a commercial density FAR of .75. The proposed Plan recommends the entire SE Corner be zoned at .5 FAR. About half of the nine acres of the SE Corner, the lots farthest away from the intersection, are currently zoned either as R-60 or as Rural Cluster, land that is either vacant or is the site of one single-family home. The County planning staff calculate that a .5 FAR for all

the SE Corner parcels would permit as many as 159 additional residential units on the corner. This would likely mean more than 600 additional residents on the site, and, because Ashton is located far from employment centers or sufficient retail establishments, each unit would likely have two cars, which would add more than 300 cars to traffic. Ashton cannot handle this level of development.

Third, we ask that, in approving the Plan, you **instruct the Planning Board to ensure that the community-based Implementation Advisory Committee (IAC) is granted effective ability to review, comment on, and make recommendations about proposed development plans** before they reach a stage where changes in the plans are unlikely to occur. The Planning Board stated that the IAC should be involved at the public hearing stage, and should not delay development approval. However, we strongly believe that the IAC should be involved early in the plan development process (e.g., at the conceptual design phase, well before submission of developer plans to the Planning Department), and IAC input should be considered by Planning Staff.

Finally, because design of buildings is so important in creating a rural feel, we ask that the **Design Guidelines in the Plan be converted to Design Requirements**. A simple comparison of the buildings proposed for the SE Corner by Nichols Development Company with those of a development built in Forest Glen demonstrates the difference that design can make for the SE Corner:



Townhouse development in Forest Glen:



Allowing the IAC to have useful input into the design process of this and other Ashton projects better ensures that the Ashton intersection will not be overwhelmed by large apartment blocks like those the Nichols Development Company is proposing.

Respectfully submitted,



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President, Sandy Spring Civic Association



Christine Hill Wilson
Treasurer, SSCA



Douglas Farquhar
Correspondence Secretary, SSCA

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