

Dear County Councilmembers,

I am a member of the Sandy Spring Ashton Rural Preservation Consortium. We are pro-rural village, not anti-development. I am writing to encourage you to approve and adopt most of the recommendations in the Ashton Village Center Sector Plan (AVCSP) Draft, and to change some aspects of it. Specifically, I request that you revise the Plan to:

1. Reduce maximum heights to 40' rather than the proposed 45' on the site at the southeast quadrant of Route 108 and MD 650 (New Hampshire Avenue).
2. Direct the Planning Board to require that developers meet with the proposed Implementation Advisory Committee at the conceptual planning phase rather than the last minute before submitting their plans for regulatory review.

In my nine years as a site plan reviewer with the Montgomery County Planning Department in the 1990s, I learned that zoning is the bottom line, and the Master Plan text might or might not be adhered to in approvals. While I applaud the Planning staff for great detail in the AVCSP Design Guidelines, I am concerned that because these are guidelines, they may be pushed aside by developers who are by law required only to conform with zoning. In the case of AVCSP, that means that 45' tall buildings, which are 150% the height of the tallest building in the area, would potentially cover a substantial part of the planning area. Buildings in Ashton should not be more than 3 stories if we are to retain any semblance of a rural village or compatibility with the existing context.

An Implementation Advisory Committee (IAC) has been effective in other areas of the County, including Bethesda and Olney, but only because the developers meet with the committee in the early phase of planning and design. I urge you to direct the Planning Board to require developer meetings with the IAC early enough to have discussions that may result in designs more in keeping with the intent of the Master Plan. As a staff member of the Planning Department and more recently of Park Planning, I appreciate our desire as public servants to collect and incorporate input from Montgomery County residents. I am certain that the Council and Planning Board also wish to have as inclusive a process as possible. The reality is that the process is very difficult and complicated for most residents. If the IAC, comprised of all stakeholders, gives feedback early in the design process to developers, it will result in plans that are less controversial once they reach the Planning Board, and, probably much better.

Thank you for your attention to these important details of the Plan.

Sincerely,

Brooke Farquhar,

Clarksville, MD 21029 (2 miles from Ashton Village)