

We live in the Spring Lawn Farm neighborhood in Ashton where we have been residents for almost 28 years. Spring Lawn Farm is diagonally across New Hampshire Avenue from the proposed development on the southeast corner of the intersection of New Hampshire Avenue and Route 108. We have concerns about some of the provisions that are contained in the Planning Board draft of the Ashton Village Center Sector Plan. These concerns center around traffic, pedestrian safety, building heights, and the implementation advisory committee.

Prior to purchasing our current home in 1993, we went to the Montgomery County Planning Department and reviewed the 1980 Sandy Spring Ashton Master Plan. Based on that Plan, we purchased our home. When the 1980 plan was updated, we actively participated in the meetings because of the proposed impact to our neighborhood. Bruce participated in meetings with other residents and the developer of the property that would impact our neighborhood. Based on those meetings, a compromise was reached that was suitable to all parties.

Following adoption of the Plan, Kathleen was a founding member of the board of the Greater Sandy Spring Green Space land trust, formed to address the green space created through the Plan. Over the past two years, she has participated in the meetings that have been held during the development of the Ashton Village Center Sector Plan and testified before the Planning Board.

As our neighborhood is just south of the intersection of Route 108 and New Hampshire Avenue, we are very affected by how well the intersection functions. Prior to the pandemic, afternoon traffic would back up on New Hampshire Avenue in front of our neighborhood for about a mile to the south, making it difficult to turn left. Morning traffic was bad because of commuters, and the schools (two high schools and an elementary school) on Route 108. While the completion of the Inter County Connector initially took some of the traffic off Route 108, the traffic has increased on both Route 108 and New Hampshire Avenue due to additional development in Olney, north of Ashton, and to the east in Howard County.

In addition to the level of traffic, the intersection lacks any signage, lights, or pavement markings for pedestrians. While we are within walking distance to the post office, bank, and drug store, we drive because of the lack of sidewalks, crosswalks, and walk signals. The configuration of the intersection makes it very dangerous to cross.

The provisions of the draft Ashton Village Plan allow for a significant increase in the number of units that will be built on the southeast corner of the intersection of Route 108 and New Hampshire Avenue, the only undeveloped corner of this intersection. Based on the proposed zoning, the technical appendix indicates that there could be over 150 units. Currently, there is only one Metro bus that serves Ashton, and it only runs during the morning and evening rush hours and only during the week, and there is no Ride-On bus service. As a result, residents of any new housing units will need to have cars. Most households with two adults have two cars and, if the household is multi-generational or includes a teenager, there could be more.

It is critical that adequate onsite parking be provided that includes parking for residents' work commercial vehicles. Inadequate parking on the southeast corner will create a safety hazard because the only available offsite parking is across New Hampshire Avenue or Route 108, which would be even more dangerous at night. Further, we do not want our neighborhood to become an overflow parking area.

The Planning Board draft includes a provision to rezone the property on the southeast corner to allow 45-foot building heights, which is ten feet taller than Ashton's current tallest building. We believe that the height limit for that corner should be consistent with the 35-foot height limitation of the other corners of the intersection. This would still allow a significant increase in the number of housing units beyond what was previously allowed on the entire property and would help keep development to a level that would allow adequate onsite parking. In addition, it would keep this corner from being out of scale with the rest of the center of Ashton.

We strongly support the provision for the implementation advisory committee. However, the language about the implementation advisory committee in the Plan is rather vague. To be effective, the implementation advisory committee should be inclusive of all interests and should be involved throughout the development process. As a member of the Greater Sandy Spring Green Space board, Kathleen participated in many of the meetings with developers following the adoption of the 1998 Sandy Spring Ashton Master Plan. As a result of these meetings, better plans evolved that were embraced by the community and the developers. We believe collaboration can achieve better outcomes.

In addition to the development envisioned in the Plan, there are many aspects of the Plan that require coordination between various County and State agencies. The implementation advisory committee would help oversee coordination between these various entities and provide valuable communication for the community.

As you consider the provisions of the Plan, we ask that you take into consideration the concerns of the residents of Ashton. We are not against development, but we are for development that results in a safe and sustainable community. We support intersection improvements, consistent building heights, and an implementation advisory committee that is involved throughout the process and will ensure all the provisions will be implemented in a way that benefits the community.

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