

February 24, 2021

Walt Fennell  
Ashton, MD 20861

Montgomery County Council  
100 Maryland Avenue, 4<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Rockville, MD 20850

RE: Ashton Village Plan

Council Members –

Thank you for providing an opportunity for community members to comment on the Ashton Village Plan. I am a resident of Ashton, and like most of the residents in Ashton, I made an intentional decision to move to Ashton several years ago, because of its unique, rural character. Although Ashton is part of Montgomery County, it is uniquely situated and is entirely different from the more urban portions of the County. Because Ashton is different from say Germantown or Bethesda or Gaithersburg, concepts which are appropriate for our urban centers should not be adopted in rural areas like Ashton.

I recognize that Montgomery County is a rapidly growing County and because of this fact, changes are inevitable. I would also note that I am not opposed to change or growth, but I would hope that the inevitable changes would be practical and reasonable and that the changes would be consistent with the rural character of Ashton.

I would respectfully, offer the following thoughts on the proposed Ashton Village Plan.

1. Density. The density recommendations outlined in the Ashton Village Plan would significantly increase the density of Ashton. I fully recognize the need to increase housing stock within the County, but the FAR recommendations in the Plan would increase the density of Ashton Village by over 100%. This is simply not reasonable and this change would inextricably change the rural character of Ashton. I would respectfully request the County Council to modify the increased FAR ratings recommended in the Ashton Village Plan to a more moderate increase, for example a FAR of .25, and that the Council clarify the exact portions of the Ashton Village Plan to which this rating would be applied.

2. Building Heights. The existing Ashton Master Plan limits building heights to 30 feet. The recommendations in the Ashton Village Plan would allow building height increases of 50%. Once again, a dramatic departure from the prior plan. Some have postulated that an increase of 15 feet (50%) is a small increase. But this is simply not the case. A 50% increase to anything is SIGNIFICANT. This increase would result in buildings which were completely out-of-scale for a rural village. Simply stated buildings of this height will tower over all other buildings in Ashton and is not consistent with the rural nature of our village. If there is a need to increase building heights to accommodate “Missing Middle” housing (see #3 below) or more affordable housing options, it seems that this could be accommodated with a reasonable height limit increase of 16% or 5 feet for a total building height of 35 feet.

3. Missing Middle. I understand and agree with the need to provide affordable housing alternatives for younger families, singles, older couples, and other individuals across the income spectrum who are in need of affordable housing within Montgomery County. The Missing Middle concepts which can be found in various jurisdictions around the country and even in some parts of Montgomery County (i.e., Pike and Rose) are exciting and innovative building alternatives. However, Ashton is entirely different from North Bethesda and from many of the other locations around the country where these concepts have been embraced. Most Missing Middle developments are co-located to business centers and are serviced by robust, integrated public transit. Two key components which are missing from Ashton. I would respectfully request that the Council and the Planning Board consider a “Rural” Missing Middle concept for Ashton.

A Rural Missing Middle concept would consist of thoughtfully designed, compact, affordable housing which complements the historic rural character of Ashton. The buildings would be house-scaled buildings, accommodating 2, 3 or 4 family units with deep, open spaces for community gatherings. The Appendix (Ashton Alliance Housing Concepts) to this letter includes examples of the type of small cottages, small stylish townhomes, and appropriately scaled 2, 3, and 4 block homes which are height limited in a manner consistent with the rural character of Ashton. Height limits would be capped at 2 or 2.5 story buildings. I believe that the housing concepts highlighted in the Appendix provides a reasonable compromise between the need to provide affordable housing without inextricably changing the rural nature of Ashton.

4. Design Guidelines. There are many instances across the County and country of communities adopting specific and development/redevelopment design guidelines. I would respectfully request that the Council and the Planning Board ensure that enforceable design guidelines are included within the Ashton Village Plan to ensure the implementation of a clear and coherent plan.

5. Implementation Advisory Committee. I agree with the Implementation Advisory Committee concept included in the Ashton Village Plan. I believe the Council should strengthen the wording and role of the Implementation Advisory Committee. Specifically, provisions should be included to ensure that any future development/redevelopment to the Ashton Village would be coordinated with the Implementation Advisory Committee. The coordination efforts should take place at each stage of development/redevelopment to ensure the consistent adoption of design guidelines and to help ensure that the Ashton Community is part of the development/redevelopment process.

Thank you for your consideration of these points. I remain hopeful that these reasonable changes will be adopted and included within the Ashton Village Plan to allow our small piece of Montgomery County to retain its rural character.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Walt Fennell". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial "W" and a long, sweeping tail.

Walt Fennell

## Appendix



# Housing Concepts

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THE ASHTON ALLIANCE

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# The Ashton Alliance Supports

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1. Thoughtfully designed, compact, affordable housing which complements the historic rural character of Ashton.
2. House-scale buildings, accommodating 2, 3 or 4 family units with deep, open spaces for community gatherings.
3. A comprehensive plan for 2020, and beyond to 2050, implemented with transparent community support.



# Missing Middle

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- The concept of “Missing Middle” is typically rooted around an urban setting, like Rockville’s Pike and Rose development.
- Rockville’s size, business centers, and access to public transit provide a perfect setting for prevailing Missing Middle concepts.



# Rural Missing Middle

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- As a historically rural part of Montgomery County, Ashton needs a Missing Middle concept that is adapted to a rural setting.
- Ashton needs a Missing Middle concept focused on small, stylish housing, congruent with the surroundings of a rural village.





# Rural Missing Middle

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- Ashton does not have access to a large, integrated public transit network capable of moving hundreds of people.
- Ashton does not have multiple business centers capable of supporting large volumes of workers.



# Rural Missing Middle

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- Ashton, is a rural center, with deep roots centered around families, communities and open spaces.
- Ashton is the perfect setting for the implementation of a “rural” Missing Middle project.



# Housing Concepts

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The Ashton Alliance supports:

- Affordable cottages lining deep courtyards with shared spaces for community gatherings.



# Housing Concepts

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The Ashton Alliance supports:

- Small, stylish townhomes priced appropriately for the Missing Middle.





# Housing Concepts

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The Ashton Alliance supports:

- Appropriately scaled, 2, 3 or 4 block homes.



# Housing Concepts

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The Ashton Alliance supports:

- A mix of modestly sized homes.



# Housing Concepts

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The Ashton Alliance supports:

- Development which includes open, village spaces.





# Small Cottage Example

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# Small Cottage Example

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# Duplex Example

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Door to 2<sup>nd</sup> unit  
located on side of  
home.



# Duplex Example

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# Duplex Example

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# Townhome Example

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# Townhome Example

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# Townhome Example

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# Village Green Example

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# Village Green Example

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# Village Green Example

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