

This testimony is submitted on behalf of the Spring Lawn Farm Homeowners' Association. Spring Lawn Farm is on the west side of New Hampshire Avenue just south of the intersection of New Hampshire Avenue and Route 108.

While the Plan before you includes many things we support, there are also areas of concern.

First, the provisions that we support:

- An implementation advisory committee.
- Safe sidewalks and side paths where they are missing.
- Pedestrian safety improvements, including crosswalks and pedestrian signals across all parts of the intersection of Route 108 and New Hampshire Avenue.
- Intersection improvements without expanding the overall size of the intersection, including moving the pole at the corner of New Hampshire Avenue and Route 108.
- Expansion of the hiking and biking network in the area.
- Provision of signage that connects the village center to historic and cultural resources of the greater Ashton community.

Each of these provisions are critical and long overdue. While the Spring Lawn Farm neighborhood is close to the bank, post office, and various businesses in Ashton, there is no sidewalk or side path, or crosswalks with signals that enable us to walk there safely.

Our biggest concern with the Plan is the development on the southeast corner because of its proximity to our neighborhood. The entrance to our neighborhood is less than one tenth of a mile from the southern edge of this property and some of the homes in our HOA back to a narrow row of houses directly across New Hampshire Avenue from it. We will be directly impacted by the traffic, noise, and light pollution generated by this development.

The technical appendix indicates that it is possible that over 150 units could be developed on the southeast corner. The Plan relies on support for suggested expansion of WMATA or Ride-on service to address traffic concerns. Given the current budget situation, it is not clear if, and when, this would occur. Ashton is served currently by a single WMATA bus that runs only during the morning and evening rush hours and not on weekends. It has been slated for elimination at various times, most recently in 2020. The lack of adequate public transit means that most residents will be reliant on cars. In this area, most households with two adults have two cars and, if there are teenagers or it is a multigenerational residence, possibly three.

It is imperative that adequate onsite parking be provided, including for residents with commercial work vehicles. It is a pedestrian safety issue since offsite parking would require crossing New Hampshire Avenue or Route 108. Given the proximity to our neighborhood, we are concerned about the potential impact of overflow parking on our streets.

Besides the number of units, the proposed height limits exceed those of the development on adjacent corners of the intersection, as well as single family homes that border the property. Rezoning the entire site (except BG&E portion) to 45 feet with limitations based on a loosely drawn bubble diagram would allow for broad interpretation. Going to 45 feet allows for buildings that are 15 feet higher than the current tallest building in Ashton that is 30 feet high. Most buildings even in Olney are not that tall. We request that building heights be limited to 40 feet.

Effective and enforceable design guidelines are needed to help mitigate the visual impacts of the massing of buildings on the southeast corner—even with a 40-foot building height—that will be much greater than the surrounding corners. So far, the only design that has been shared for this property was at the third work session of the Planning Board and it was not viewed as being aesthetically consistent with the intent of the Plan.

The Plan includes a short paragraph regarding the implementation advisory committee (IAC). The IAC is envisioned to help engage the community in the implementation of the various aspects of the Plan. It has been suggested that for development proposals the IAC should be involved at the end of the process at the same time as the community meetings to avoid additional time and money for the developer.

Instead, we believe that engagement early on and throughout the process would have the opposite effect, especially since the community has been given little information as to the actual plans for the site—a site that defines the entryway into Ashton from the south and will be the dominating feature of Ashton for the future. We ask that the IAC be established similar to the Olney Town Center Advisory Committee that is seated at the table with the developer when plans are presented to the Planning Board.

While the southeast corner is the focal point of development and community concern, possibility for redevelopment exists for the Ashton Village Shopping Center and the remainder of the properties on Porter Road. The IAC should advise on all the properties covered by the Plan.

In summary, we ask that the final plan approved by the County Council ensure adequate onsite parking, building heights limited to 40 feet, effective and enforceable design guidelines, and an implementation advisory committee that is engaged throughout the process and is established similar to the Olney Town Center Advisory Committee.

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