

March 1, 2021

Dear County Council Members ::

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I am writing to ask the Council to do 2 things regarding the Planning Board Proposal for the Southeast corner of the Rt. 108 and New Hampshire Ave. crossroads :

1. Reduce the maximum building height to 30 feet

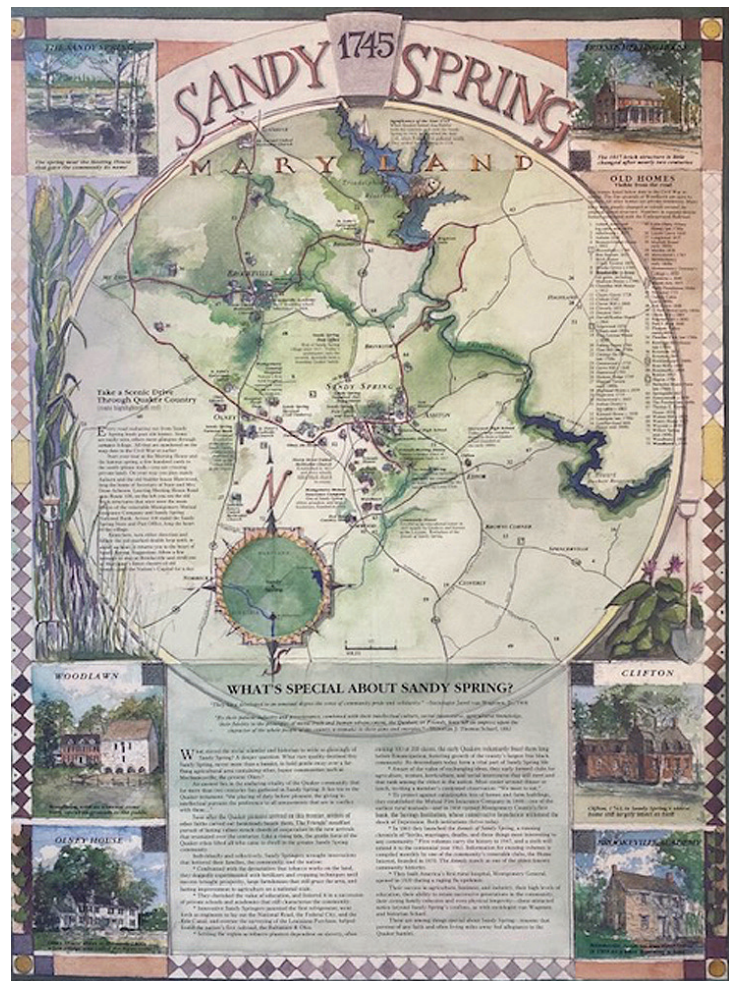
2. Create an Implementation Advisory Committee to aid in design and density

CONCERNING ITEM 1— The community has no objection to a “signature building” at the corner of the intersection being 40 to 45 feet tall, but believe that to maintain the “rural” character that the Planning Board urges, the rest of the area must be no higher than 30 feet. Otherwise the monolithic display of rows of townhouses, stacked flats, etc. will completely kill the “view shed” of one of the most historic areas in all of Montgomery County. At present the tallest building in Ashton is 30 feet and it looks huge and out of place.

Here is the disturbing conundrum concerning the Planning Board proposal : They have provided very attractive suggestions concerning design. These are the **subjective** aspects of the plan, all open to extremely wide interpretation. But the **objective** aspects of the proposal — their suggested building height and the .5 FAR—will allow as many as 640 new human beings to occupy this 9 acre plot of land (3 acres of which are unbuildable wetlands). Along with these 640 humans, will be their 300 additional cars—a modest estimate. **Subjective proposals mean no more to a developer than unenforceable suggestions.**

Do we think the developer will destroy this 9 acres by over-developing? We don't know... the community has yet to see any of his plans. The overarching problem, though, is that he **can** and this plan will allow him to do just that.

At right is a poster created by Miche Booz, architect of the Sandy Spring Museum, an artist and town planner who lives in the community and has been of great help in imagining how Ashton can develop sensibly. He has, in fact, helped Mr. Nichols, the present



developer, with his own designs as well. The poster was done years ago to highlight the historic houses in the area and Miche tells me that the text was written by a historian at the Smithsonian. (I wish it was readable.)

In fact, the neighborhood I live in, Spring Lawn Farm, was built on the eighteenth-century Quaker farm that was owned by Richard Thomas. The house he lived in was called “Cherry Grove.” It was built in 1732 and is currently privately owned. On a walk through our neighborhood, you can just see its roof among a grove of cedars. One of the outbuildings that was torn down by the developer of our neighborhood, turned out to be a slave cabin made out of logs and there was a great uproar published in the Washington Post the early 90s concerning its destruction by the developer. Of the history of the cabin, the Post article says it was “... built in 1783 and one of the oldest residences in the county....documents place eight elderly slaves where the cabin used to be in 1807.” All that is left now is a fireplace that I have “adopted” and continue to reclaim from the encroaching underbrush around the neighborhood pond.

CONCERNING ITEM 2 — What ultimately gets built on the Southeast corner of the crossroads in Ashton will either enhance or destroy the feeling of the rich history that our surrounding community offers to all of Montgomery County. There are families still living in the community that are descendants of the first settlers that came here over 300 years ago. There are also descendants of slaves freed by the Quaker farmers long before emancipation who still call this community home as well. Here is a short video created years ago by Kahlfani Hatcher, a student at Montgomery College. (It makes for good COVID-lockdown entertainment and you may even recognize one of the narrators!) :

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XRY5wYAzJb8>

Please notice the number of times “rural” occurs in the Planning Board proposal. What is the meaning of the word? It certainly means different things to different people and because of that, it is essential that an **Implementation Advisory Committee**—made up of developers/citizens/planning board members—be established to decide what rural means. This committee should act as the community’s first line of defense in protecting both its rural and historic character and help the developer to design a project that will be mutually acceptable to all parties. **But most essential would be the backing of the Council with the authority to say “no.”**

Sincerely,

Charles Glendinning