

MONTGOMERY COUNTY COUNCIL PUBLIC HEARING on

GREAT SENECA SECTOR PLAN

JULY 12, 2024

Testimony by Francoise M. Carrier on behalf of Guardian Realty Management, Inc.

Good evening, President Friedson and members of the Council. My name is Francoise Carrier, with the law firm of Bregman, Berbert, Schwartz & Gilday. It is my pleasure to speak tonight on behalf of Guardian Realty Management, owner of a property identified as an Opportunity Site in the Planning Board Draft of the Great Seneca Sector Plan.

Guardian would like to extend its thanks to the Planning Board and its staff for their hard work on this plan and their willingness to consider feedback from property owners. Guardian fully supports the vision of the draft plan and is in agreement with the zoning and density recommended for its property. Guardian does have two changes to suggest to encourage successful redevelopment in the Life Sciences Center.

Guardian's property abuts Shady Grove Road and Research Boulevard. Its project site includes land that abuts an open space between Guardian's site and an existing multi-family building known as Mallory Square. This open space was dedicated as a public right-of-way and intended as a road, but has never been built out. The draft plan recommends constructing it as a two-lane road with separated bike lanes. Guardian believes that instead, it should be a bike and pedestrian pathway with some of the open space preserved.

Turning this space into a vehicular roadway would make it difficult for vehicles to enter and exit Guardian's property, and would place traffic pressure on future development on Guardian's site as well as the entrances to some of the units at Mallory Square. Instead of reducing the appeal of both Mallory Square and Guardian's site, this land could provide a spot of unpressured connectivity for pedestrians and bicyclists and a welcome extension of the proposed pedestrian greenway along Key West Boulevard. Moreover, this short road segment would not make a meaningful contribution to vehicular connectivity unless it were extended further north, on the other side of Research Boulevard. In that location, its proposed route would go right through a large parking garage and other buildings that are part of The Grove development. Guardian is very familiar with the Grove and with this garage, which contains a significant number of spaces that are obligated to an existing multi-family building. It is very unlikely that the garage will be demolished during the life of this plan. If the Council considers it important, ultimately, to have a vehicular roadway on the open space adjoining Guardian's site, Guardian requests language in the sector plan indicating that adjoining development will not be required to build the road segment unless redevelopment on the Grove property has been approved – or at least an application is pending – that will result in building the next segment of the road. This would

avoid making redevelopment of Guardian's site both less attractive and more costly, at least in the short run.

Guardian's second request relates to parking. The draft plan includes an urban design recommendation related to parking facilities that could make it impossible for a small site like Guardian's, which is visible from a public roadway on two and possibly three sides, to use anything other than structured parking – and possibly only underground parking. This additional cost would make it more difficult for Guardian to obtain financing to redevelop the property. This plan needs to provide maximum incentive for all properties to redevelop if it is going to successfully spur new projects that will help meet the plan's many important goals. Attached to my written testimony is a small but important language change that Guardian requests to avoid this disincentive.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to speak this evening.

LANGUAGE CHANGE REQUESTED BY GUARDIAN REALTY

RE: PARKING

Planning Board Draft, p. 29

“The Plan pursues a more compact form of development that promotes infill, adaptive reuse, and vertical growth. The public realm and the form and location of buildings should contribute to an active place that encourages social interaction and enables healthy lifestyle choices.

1. Establish a Life Sciences Center Overlay Zone for the entire Life Sciences Center area, including all parcels shown in Figure 16, that supports mixed-use life sciences development, and incentivizes production of affordable and market-rate housing.
2. Rezone all parcels in the Life Sciences Center as shown in Figure 17 and Table 1.
3. Amend the Thrive Growth Map to include the Life Sciences Center as a large center.
4. Encourage compact, mixed-use development near transit that integrates and connects life sciences uses with residential uses, retail, and neighborhood services and amenities.
5. Promote vertical organization of life sciences spaces to make land available for mixed-use and public open space.
6. Encourage adaptive reuse of existing structures, coupled with infill development, when feasible.
7. Encourage consolidation of parking facilities in garages that are not visible from pedestrian areas, preferably lined with building uses or screened when visible from streets and public open spaces.
8. Develop Design Guidelines to promote design excellence and provide . . .”