

Re: University Boulevard Corridor Plan

Dear Council President and Members of the Montgomery County Council,

I am writing to register my strong **opposition** to the University Boulevard Corridor Plan as currently drafted. While I share the goal of building a safer and more livable county, this plan poses significant risks to the community, commuters, and the local economy.

Community Impacts

First, the planning process itself has been deeply flawed. Outreach has been narrow and inconsistent, with key neighborhoods—including those most directly affected—excluded from meaningful engagement. Residents repeatedly raised concerns, yet these have gone largely unaddressed. This lack of transparency undermines public trust and calls into question the legitimacy of the plan.

The plan also threatens to dismantle longstanding cultural and community anchors. For example, the Kemp Mill Shopping Center serves as an irreplaceable hub for Montgomery County's Jewish community, housing kosher establishments, synagogues, and essential neighborhood services. Redevelopment in this area risks displacing these institutions, disrupting community life, and permanently altering neighborhood character.

Finally, the rezoning and upzoning recommendations would open the door to large-scale redevelopment, encouraging displacement of long-time residents and gentrification. Instead of strengthening community ties, the plan risks eroding them.

Commuter Impacts

The transportation elements of the plan are also deeply troubling. Reducing travel lanes, lowering speed limits, eliminating merge zones, and restricting turns may be intended to improve safety, but the practical result will be severe congestion, longer commutes, and unsafe traffic spillover into residential side streets.

The bus lanes themselves present a very real danger. My wife and another close friend were both victims of auto accidents caused by drivers speeding down the bus lanes. I personally have had several near misses when trying to exit onto University Boulevard, nearly struck by cars misusing the bus lanes. Far from enhancing safety, these design features create confusion and encourage reckless driving behaviors.

Examples elsewhere in the county—such as the failed “road diet” on Old Georgetown Road—demonstrate that these strategies can make traffic worse, not better. The plan's heavy reliance on Bus Rapid Transit and bicycle infrastructure may benefit a small minority,

but it ignores the overwhelming majority of residents who continue to depend on their cars for commuting, errands, and family responsibilities.

Overloading intersections like University Boulevard and Arcola Avenue without proven mitigation strategies will create recurring backups and safety hazards. In short, the plan is impractical and inequitable for commuters.

Economic Impacts

The economic consequences are equally concerning. By encouraging redevelopment without strong protections, the plan risks displacing the small businesses that give these neighborhoods their vitality—particularly the niche businesses that serve cultural and religious needs. If even one kosher market or restaurant were to close, it would devastate the community that depends on it.

Meanwhile, the housing envisioned by the plan is largely market-rate, inviting outside investors and developers to profit while doing little to expand genuine affordability. This not only threatens local businesses but also risks destabilizing property values and creating downward pressure on existing neighborhoods.

Conclusion


In its current form, the University Boulevard Corridor Plan is not the right path forward. It undermines community stability, threatens cherished institutions, worsens congestion for commuters, introduces unsafe traffic patterns, and risks harming the local economy. I urge the Council to reject this plan and to direct staff to return with a revised approach that:

- Engages communities fully and fairly.
- Protects established cultural and commercial hubs.
- Addresses the dangers and misuse of bus lanes, and prioritizes realistic transportation solutions for the majority of commuters.
- Ensures economic development that strengthens, rather than displaces, existing neighborhoods and businesses.

Thank you for your consideration of this testimony and for your service to our county.

Respectfully,

Larry Jaffe

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