

22 September 2025

Dear Council President Stewart, Council Vice President Jawando, and other members of the Montgomery County Council:

I am writing to share information and views regarding the Planning Board Draft of the University Boulevard Corridor Plan (UBCP, or “Plan”). This written correspondence supplements the in-person testimony that I gave at the public hearing on September 10, 2025.

I have lived more than 30 years in Montgomery County, including more than 22 years in the South Four Corners neighborhood that includes University Blvd and a number of properties that would be directly affected by the UBCP. I am a past President of the South Four Corners Citizens Association (SFCCA), and am currently the SFCCA Representative to the Corridor Advisory Committee (CAC) for US 29. I am writing here as an individual, expressing my own views, though I also encourage you to consult the SFCCA positions presented by the Association president in his public testimony.

Everyone can support the general statements of *aspirational* goals in the current UBC Plan. However, the **details** of the specific proposals matter, and the inevitable impacts on our suburban communities would be significant and negative. This is especially true for the **significant changes that were made by the Planning Board after the end of the public input period**. For example, the Plan now recommends there be a dedicated bus lane through the Four Corners intersection with Colesville Rd (US 29). As Mr. Rixey admitted to you during your September 8 bus tour, Planning did not have the time or resources to study the impacts of the dedicated bus lanes change (including on the left turns onto Colesville Rd). **You need to send this plan back to the Planning Department for real impact analysis** and real community engagement.

Where analysis was performed, the results show how completely unrealistic the Plan vision is. For example, Planning staff told you on September 9 about “expanding the tree canopy” and “designing University Blvd as a ‘cool corridor’ with green infrastructure.” They apparently failed to read the **August 4 memo from the County’s Department of Environmental Protection**, which includes the following (bolding added):

Increasing allowed density and intensity of development along the University Boulevard corridor will **almost certainly result in a decrease in tree canopy**, an **increase in impervious surfaces**. Both results will contribute to an **increased heat-island effect**, which is **detrimental to both human health and aquatic and other biological resources**. Both changes will **also have a negative impact on other environmental factors**, such as reduced absorption and infiltration of stormwater, reduced filtration of air particulate matter, and reduced habitat, among other parameters.

While the stated goals are commendable, many of the proposed plans may contradict these objectives. Increasing the tree canopy alongside higher development density will be **nearly impossible** without specific mechanisms to achieve this goal. Although developing a ‘cool’ corridor is recommended, the **suggested housing types will likely lead to more driveways, more parking, and less space for features that contribute to a ‘cool’ corridor**. Minimizing impervious surfaces is mentioned, but will be **difficult or impossible to achieve with the recommended changes to housing density**.

My neighbors and I support changes to improve safety on University Blvd -- and also on the residential streets within our neighborhoods. Diverting traffic onto 'more connected' neighborhood roads will diminish pedestrian, bicycle, and automobile safety on those narrow residential streets with few sidewalks. The Maryland Department of Transportation (MDOT) **Pedestrian Safety Action Plan** for University Blvd is already pursuing safety improvements that are not linked to this UBCP, and can be done **without requiring the zoning changes or road redesigns proposed**.

The County needs **affordable** housing. Unfortunately, this UBC Plan will provide **market rate** housing. It will replace the more affordable existing housing near the corridor with expensive rental properties. Given the demographics of the population within the boundary -- 66% non-white -- the Council should request the Office of Legislative Oversight to perform a racial equity and social justice analysis. Also, the UBC Plan does not create badly needed opportunities for home ownership, but instead risks incentivizing outside investors to purchase single-family homes -- outbidding first-time homebuyers -- and build expensive rental properties that will generate income for the investors. As noted recently by SDAT (State Department of Assessment and Taxation), there is an increasing trend towards private equity firms and other large institutional investors buying up residential properties in neighborhoods like those along University Blvd.

Montgomery Planning's recent analysis of the County's development pipeline did not identify zoning as a barrier for stalled housing projects. **Zoning changes are not a solution to address the need for more affordable housing.** Focus on the real issues in the recent analysis.

The more than **4,000 new residential units** from this UBC Plan would significantly increase **pressure on already overburdened infrastructure and services** -- schools, water and sewer, policing, etc. There are already significant challenges in these areas, and it is not clear that sufficient infrastructure would be in place to accommodate the planned development. It is also unclear that Montgomery County's Growth and Infrastructure Policy (GIP) would provide adequate funds to pay the cost of the **needed additional infrastructure that should precede development**.

The whole Plan is based on a University Blvd **BRT** (Bus Rapid Transit) that **has not been studied, much less funded, designed, or built**. Whenever a BRT is built on University Blvd, it is highly unlikely that the **limited-stop** BRT buses on University Blvd will address the added transportation demand from the increased density proposed.

Significant increases in **cut-through traffic** are inevitable with the proposed plans, due to reducing and narrowing the travel lanes on University Blvd, and extending access to **neighborhood side streets that would act as parallel routes**. Among other things, this creates **safety concerns for residents and students**, esp. as many of our narrow neighborhood streets do not have sidewalks. Most of the 4,000 new households will also have **cars that must be parked on crowded neighborhood streets, adding to safety concerns** there.

The **suburban neighborhoods** bordering University Blvd are **already diverse** in many ways. We embrace this diversity, welcome new residents, and support providing equitable housing opportunities (both rental and especially home ownership) to current and future generations of residents. Our neighborhoods are already walkable, and there are many essential services a short

distance away, allowing many neighbors to successfully age in place. This is at risk with the current proposed plans for the University Blvd corridor.

This first **corridor** plan is not a traditional master plan designed with suburban residential communities in mind, and with their engagement and input. Please **send this plan back to the Planning Department for real analysis of the impacts of the recommendations ... and to get community input on the many significant changes made recently** by the Planning Board -- such as increasing allowed **building heights up to 100 feet**; moving the “**street grid**” to a near-term study; and removing the recommendation to evaluate the historic status of the **Woodmoor Shopping Center**. There is **precedence for sending such a poorly conceived and unpopular plan back to Montgomery Planning**.

Going forward, please focus on data-driven proposals to **improve safety** in our communities, and to **provide affordable housing** throughout the County in ways that do not adversely impact our existing suburban residential neighborhoods. Your constituents are depending on you to show leadership in working with communities to protect and promote the safety and well-being of all our neighborhoods' residents.

Thank you for your consideration,

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