

**SLIGO WOODS CIVIC ASSOCIATION POSITION STATEMENT
ON THE
UNIVERSITY BOULEVARD CORRIDOR PLAN**

The Sligo Woods Civic Association (SWCA) is submitting this statement on behalf of a majority of its voting member households in order to share with the County Council its position on the University Boulevard Corridor (UBC) Plan.

Sligo Woods is a diverse neighborhood of small, relatively affordable houses next to Sligo Creek Park. It is bounded on the north and east by University Boulevard and on the south by Dennis Avenue, corresponding with voting precinct 13-42. The Plan now pending before the Council places roughly half of the neighborhood within the UBC zone and proposes to rezone to a higher density all homes bordering University Boulevard and one block in, add certain safety and environmental enhancements along the UBC, and open several streets within the neighborhood to University Boulevard traffic. Our views on the Plan are detailed below:

THE PEDESTRIAN SAFETY AND WALKABILITY ENHANCEMENTS, BIKE-FRIENDLY SIDEPATHS, AND ENVIRONMENTAL IMPROVEMENTS PROPOSED BY THE PLAN ARE WELCOME, BUT MUST BE FUNDED UP FRONT BY DEVELOPERS

There is strong support within the SWCA community for the wider, buffered sidewalks and walkable, bike-friendly sidepaths along the UBC that are envisioned by the Plan, as well as for plans to add tree canopy, preserve green spaces, and improve storm drainage. These enhancements will make the UBC a safer and more enjoyable place for walking and biking, and help the County meet environmental objectives.

However, we were disappointed to learn during Planning Board work sessions that there is no intention to require the addition of these amenities concurrent with the development of new housing types. Instead, the Planning Board has taken the position that doing so would be “too costly” for individual developers and therefore proposes that these features be funded by taxpayers at some later date through a Capital Improvement Project (CIP), possibly through the MCDOT.

We oppose delaying the development of these amenities. This area is already struggling with pedestrian safety/walkability issues and currently has no off-street bike paths running parallel to the UBC. Delaying these features while at the same time adding thousands of people to the corridor through housing development will exponentially increase these existing problems. The idea that these amenities can be funded at some future date through a CIP fails to take into account the current budget pressures the County and State are facing. Delay may mean “never,” and that is unacceptable.

EXPANDED TRANSIT OPTIONS ARE WELCOME, BUT THE FUNDING MECHANISM NEEDS TO BE CLARIFIED

Residents value the expanded bus connections proposed by the Plan, seeing this as a lifeline for non-drivers and commuters. However, Plan discussions reflected confusion about how, and by whom, these transit options will be funded and about the timeline for development in relation to proposed new housing. Clarification is needed before this Plan moves forward.

THE PLAN PROPOSES NEW HOUSING DEVELOPMENT ON A SCALE THAT IS TOO EXTREME FOR THIS ALREADY CONGESTED CORRIDOR AND FAILS TO ADEQUATELY ADDRESS INFRASTRUCTURE AND PUBLIC SERVICES STRAINS

While residents generally support the County's goals of creating more diverse housing types and populations, the scale of the proposed expansion is of concern. The Plan aims to add 4,000 new and higher-density residential housing units in the UBC rezoning area, which would more than double the current number of units along the UBC. Assuming an average of three persons per unit, this would mean a population increase of 12,000 in the 3.5-mile stretch of the UBC. This scale of development would transform this neighborhood from a quiet suburban area, which residents chose and value, to a busy downtown. Based on experiences with new construction in other parts of the County and the lack of a mandate for affordable housing within the Plan, it is also highly likely that this scale of new construction would price many current residents, including retirees, out of their homes as property taxes rise. The Plan makes no meaningful commitment to preserving naturally occurring affordable housing in the area nor to creating affordable opportunities.

While proposing to significantly increase the number of persons living along the UBC, the Plan in its current form fails to address resulting impacts on traffic, stormwater, schools, policing, and emergency services, and in some cases would compound these problems. For example:

- Many schools in the area are already overcrowded and underfunded. The Plan proposes simply reassigning neighborhood students to other schools if overcrowding in our community schools becomes a greater issue, creating total uncertainty for residents about the alignment of their homes and where their children will go to school. This is not a neighborhood-enhancing solution.
- Traffic snarls in Four Corners and speeding and congestion along the UBC and adjacent streets are significant issues that will only be compounded as thousands more people are added to the area.
- Our neighborhood falls within the Wheaton Police District, which currently has a nearly 20% sworn officer vacancy rate that the County has struggled for years to address.

We are especially concerned about the Plan's proposal to open many Sligo Woods side streets (including Orange Drive) to University Boulevard and to connect Gilmore Drive across Dennis Avenue to run parallel to University Boulevard. Our neighborhood consists of many narrow and winding streets with parking on both sides, without direct access to the major roads. Increased access will bring excessive spillover traffic from University directly into the neighborhood, encourage cut-throughs, and generally cause an unsafe situation for those who live here, contradicting the County's Vision Zero goals.

Meaningful and up-front solutions to these and other community pressures must be articulated within the Plan before it moves forward.

As for the County's overall housing goals, we are willing to do our fair share to help meet those goals, but we encourage the County to consider placing some of the proposed housing in areas of the County that have more open space.
