

office hours
in CCL comment box

Donald L. Horowitz

To: ChevyChaseCommunity@groups.io
Subject: Development in Chevy Chase

There are two major development issues that Chevy Chase residents need to be aware of: the decision about the redevelopment of the Chevy Chase Library just north of East-West Highway and the sale of the 4H Club property on Connecticut Avenue at Taylor and Thornapple Streets.

For quite some time, the county government has been considering how to redevelop the library site. The library apparently needs extensive repairs, which the county is reluctant to finance. It is therefore considering a partnership with a developer to use the site as the location for a redeveloped library coupled with a multistory apartment building above the library. How many stories the county government has not said, but if a developer is to be induced to advance funds to help in the library portion, it will need to be assured of a sufficient number of apartments for sale or lease to make the profit profitable. If the parking lot behind the current structure is not adequate for the new building, then parking will need to be underground, another expense to be recouped from a large number of apartments. County officials earlier spoke of just a few floors above the library, but these considerations suggest grounds for skepticism. The best outcome would be a stand-alone, repaired library.

The 4H Club property is up for sale, and the 4H people have been speaking to developers. This is a very large, prime site for a major project, with numerous buildings, and the community had better be prepared for what could be a major change in the neighborhood. Any sale ought to be to an organization that will use (or improve) the facility as a conference center or a home for a university that needs a facility adjacent to Washington, DC, but not a high-rise project that will add to the congestion.

Taken together, these two projects can pose very serious problems of congestion. The county has shown itself to be very hungry for additional tax revenue, as witnessed by its large number of new high-rise buildings in Bethesda and the major problems of congestion and parking already encountered there, even before most of those buildings are occupied. County officials have said that the Connecticut Avenue corridor is another candidate for more intensive development. Obviously, they do not drive on Connecticut Avenue in what have already become the extended rush hours in both directions. If a couple of tall buildings are added to the mix, the congestion will become far more intense and will spill over to all adjacent streets, as drivers search for ways to avoid the burdensome traffic. Connecticut Avenue will become essentially a highway with traffic lights, and neighborhoods will host more speeding traffic than they already do. The environment of Chevy Chase will be irretrievably changed.

Some local government councils are aware of what is possible, but there seems to be little evidence that they are doing more than "following" the process. It is time for them to lead, rather than follow. If we want to alter our own property in even the smallest way, a permit is required in Chevy Chase, but major projects apparently do not require our collective assent. This must change. What is needed is a concerted effort to make clear that intensive development is not what Chevy Chase wants or requires. Community organization is necessary to explain to our local governments that they must coordinate together and make clear to the county council and government officials that no intensive development will meet with our approval. The pandemic has had the effect of creating an aura of quiescence about the problems. It is time to make our voice heard.

Donald L. Horowitz
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To whom it may concern:

The following are our concerns about the proposed mixed use plan for the Chevy Chase Library. We oppose residential development there, for the following reasons.

- As it is, congestion on Connecticut Avenue makes it difficult to enter and exit the Hamlet. More residential density (on top of the construction at the Purple line stop) will only make a bad situation worse.

- Additional housing and congestion on Connecticut Avenue will also result in more cars cutting through the neighborhood from East West Highway to Glendale and Dunlop Streets to Connecticut Ave to avoid the light at the corner of East West and Connecticut - a particular danger to pedestrians and especially children since there are no sidewalks on Glendale.

- That, in turn, will make the dangerous corner at East West Highway and Glendale more treacherous than it already is. We have witnessed many accidents and near misses there, and the need for a traffic light, signage and ticketing to discourage short cuts will become even more imperative.

Respectfully,

Betty Branda
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