



WESTERN MONTGOMERY COUNTY CITIZENS ADVISORY BOARD
Bethesda-Chevy Chase, North Bethesda-Garrett Park, Rockville, Potomac

March 1, 2013

The Honorable Nancy Navarro, President
Montgomery County Council
100 Maryland Avenue
Rockville, Maryland 20850

Dear Ms. Navarro:

The Western Montgomery County Citizens Advisory Board (WMCCAB) appreciates this opportunity to comment on the Montgomery County Planning Board (Planning Board) draft of the Chevy Chase Lake Sector Plan (Sector Plan) being presented to the Montgomery County Council. This letter is respectfully submitted for the record for the March 5 public hearing.

The WMCCAB has held numerous meetings with Chevy Chase Lake stakeholders throughout the Sector Plan process. Our members remained engaged with stakeholders and attended meetings of the Planning Board on the Sector Plan. Most recently, on February 19th, we received a briefing on the draft plan from Planning Board staff. This meeting also included representatives of the Connecticut Avenue Coordinating Committee (CACC), residents from the Chevy Chase Hills community, the Chevy Chase Land Company (Land Company), and one Planning Board member.

Chevy Chase Lake is well-positioned to fill a need for residential, transit-oriented development. The Chevy Chase Lake East Shopping Center should redevelop as a mixed-use community with neighborhood-serving retail before the Purple Line (*i.e.*, in Phase One of the plan), as recommended by the Planning Board. This is preferable to the Land Company's existing approval to redevelop the aging 62-year-old shopping center as a retail/office strip center. By redeveloping the center with residential and retail uses, the community will gain quality open space and other amenities that currently do not exist in this area of the County.

The WMCCAB supports the vision for compatible growth at Chevy Chase Lake that builds upon the 1990 Bethesda-Chevy Chase Master Plan and the vision to maintain the community's residential character while encouraging moderate levels of development compatible with the community character. As proposed principally in Phase One, the Sector Plan advances this vision by **preserving** the historic qualities of Chevy Chase Lake and **enhancing** quality of life and connectivity. Once the Purple Line timing is established, Phase Two also promises to **create** new choices in the area with new opportunities for community-serving shopping, housing, public spaces, and transit.

Phased Development

The WMCCAB believes phasing of the project is critical to preserving the traditional quality of Chevy Chase Lake and maximizing the opportunity to build out the new development. In Phase One, by redeveloping the Chevy Chase Lake East Shopping Center now, before the Purple Line comes in, the community will gain additional neighborhood-serving retail opportunities, housing options, open space, and other amenities.

Bethesda-Chevy Chase Regional Services Center

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To help ensure that proposed development is successful and compatible with the surrounding community, the WMCCAB believes that major redevelopment of properties in the Sector Plan area should be conditioned upon certainty with respect to the Purple Line. Accordingly, we support two Sectional Map Amendments. The first would generally reconfirm existing zoning, with exceptions for the Howard Hughes Medical Institute and the Chevy Chase Lake East Shopping Center. The second amendment would be initiated after the full funding grant agreement for the Connecticut Avenue section of the Purple Line has been approved. WMCCAB does support the Planning Board's recommendation to rezone in Phase One the Howard Hughes Medical Institute and the Land Company's Chevy Chase Lake East Shopping Center, which has an existing Preliminary Plan approval, to the recommended mixed-use CR (Commercial/Residential) Zone.

Building Heights & Design

The draft Sector Plan encompasses numerous parcels, each involving many complex issues. While it was not feasible for the WMCCAB to delve deeply into each and every concern, we are confident the County Council will carefully consider extensive feedback from its constituents. At the same time, the WMCCAB had ample opportunity to consider several important issues that we wish to amplify below.

The Planning Board recommends a building of 150 feet in height on the parcel just north of the Purple Line on the East Side of Connecticut Avenue. This is the area generally situated at the current TW Perry site. After initially recommending a 90-foot building, the Planning Board staff ultimately recommended a height of 120 feet at this location.

The CACC is concerned that a 150-foot building along Connecticut Avenue is too high and that there should be a transition between the 80-foot building to its north and the existing 150-foot building to its south. In their opinion, a lower, transitional building can be designed to step back from Connecticut Avenue to reflect the lower heights on the west side of the street without a significant reduction in the proposed density.

The Land Company believes a 150-foot building in Phase One is essential to maintaining the Sector Plan's amenities, including multiple levels of underground parking, quality open space, an internal road connection, streetscaping with generous sidewalks, and accommodations for pedestrians and bikers. According to the Land Company, reducing the height for the building will have a direct impact on density and the ability to provide all of these important improvements. The Land Company also asserts that shifting the density from the 150-foot building to the lower residential building behind it would be uneconomical due to a change in construction techniques (stick-built versus concrete construction).

At our recent meeting, the CACC and the Land Company expressed somewhat differing viewpoints with respect to the elevation of this building. We also discussed how stepping down the elevation and other design elements may soften the visual impacts. As the County Council considers this issue, we urge continued close collaboration between the community and the Land Company.

Purple Line Elevation

The Purple Line is designed to be elevated over Connecticut Avenue at the Chevy Chase Lake location. As currently designed, the section of track on the east side is supported by a "fill wall." Everyone in attendance at the WMCCAB meeting, including the Land Company and the CACC, agreed that pylons should support this section of the Purple Line in order to maintain the open nature of the area. A fill wall will serve to cut off pedestrian, bike, and vehicular connectivity in the area. Furthermore, the open section is needed to provide for the important proposed road connection between Chevy Chase Lake

Drive and Manor Road. We would urge the County Council to work closely with the Maryland Transit Administration to insure that an open section is provided as part of the Purple Line design.

Newdale Mews

Residents of the Chevy Chase Hills (CCH) community are very concerned about both the phasing of Newdale Mews redevelopment and the proposed building height. The 44 garden apartments that comprise Newdale Mews adjoin part of CCH and currently stand at 35 feet. Planning Board staff recommended maximum height for Newdale Mews of 45 feet in Phase Two. The draft Sector Plan recommends 45 feet for Newdale Mews in Phase One, and 55 feet in Phase Two. CCH is concerned that 55-foot buildings are inconsistent with the character and enjoyment of their community. In addition, they believe redevelopment of Newdale Mews should occur in Phase Two. While CCH prefers to maintain maximum building height of 35 feet, representatives who addressed the WMCCAB said they are willing to consider mitigation strategies to accommodate 45 feet.

Design Guidelines

The Planning Board recently released Design Guidelines for Chevy Chase Lake. These guidelines will help insure that the visual aesthetic of the project remains consistent with neighborhood character. Accordingly, we encourage the County Council to emphasize the importance of the Design Guidelines.

Again, the WMCCAB appreciates this opportunity to share our views on the Planning Board draft of the Chevy Chase Lake Sector Plan.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Marc Korman". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Marc Korman, Chair
Western Montgomery County
Citizens Advisory Board

cc: The Honorable Isiah Leggett, County Executive