

# theOlneyCoalition

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preserving the quality of life in Olney

May 26, 2004

Mr. Derick Berlage, Chairman  
Planning Board, MNCPPC  
8787 Georgia Avenue  
Silver Spring, Maryland 20910

Dear Chairman Berlage,

The Olney Coalition truly appreciates the time that the Planning Board and the planning staff have taken to meet with us and to listen to our concerns. We see reflections of our discussions in some of the text changes in the current DRAFT. The remainder of this note recaps our thinking about the improvements we see and the remaining concerns we still have.

## IMPROVEMENTS

- ◆ Down zoning the Norbeck Country Club property and stipulating the need for additional parkland to be designated for the Rock Creek stream valley park at the time of site plan is a good thing.
- ◆ Golden Bear is a transit-oriented area and is therefore an appropriate location for high density R200/TDR7 zoning and development of a small community. However increasing from 43 units under existing zoning to a theoretical maximum of 725 units, or even the expected build out of 595 units, is a huge change. For this reason we would like to have a statement in the master plan suggesting the findings the Development Review Committee needs to make at the time of preliminary and site plan review to ensure that what actually gets built makes sense for the site and for the area's infrastructure. Given that your decision to increase density at this site was largely based on its proximity to the ICC, it would make sense to stage the development of Golden Bear to the construction of the ICC.
- ◆ The Silo Inn rezoning to R200 in support of the principle that all commercial development belongs in the Town Center is especially encouraging because it says the master plan vision for Olney as a satellite town is taken seriously.
- ◆ We appreciate the clarification that if the 32-acre site is not needed for educational purposes it should be used for affordable housing *under the current R200 zoning for this site*. Since the Planning Board removed the staff recommendation that up to 20% of the units built on this site should be MPDUs, we would appreciate one further clarification so that the final recommendation reads: If the property is not needed for educational purposes, it should be used for affordable housing under the current R200 zoning for this site that permits up to 78 single-family dwelling units.

## SPECIFIC CONCERNS

- ◆ We disagree with staff's assertion that school enrollments will fall. Over the past two decades MCPS has consistently under-forecasted student enrollments by an average of 50%. Faulty forecasts combined with the students generated by new development planned for Upper Rock Creek, Shady Grove Sector, Olney and Sandy Spring/Ashton make it inevitable that more schools will be needed in the mid-county. Under these circumstances, to dispose of a county owned site is foolish. If the 32-acre site is not in the right place or is not the right size to meet school needs, it should be swapped for other land so that school needs are addressed first.
- ◆ Although we do not oppose the recommended rezoning of properties in the SEQ to RNC, we believe that the yields on the sewerable properties in the SEQ should be capped at .33 units per acre. We believe that the SEQ Land Use recommendations should be revised as follows: If the

MPDU law is amended to apply to large-lot zones, including the RNC zone, then the base density for the sewerable properties in the SEQ should be lowered to .28 units per acre so that the total yields including MPDUs on those properties do not exceed .33 units per acre.

- ◆ The Town Center section is clear about the community need for a Civic Center but passive about the County taking action to move it forward. We urge the Planning Board to work with the County to create strong incentives for landowners to move this effort forward sooner not later. Once again we believe the 32-acre site could be of used to enable the Civic Center project by selling the land to a private developer and using the proceeds to buy an appropriate parcel in the Town Center.
- ◆ We disagree with staff's recommendation to limit the SPA extension to a small area upstream of the current boundary within the Upper Rock Creek master plan. We understand that Williamsburg run is approaching 19% impervious and that 20% is a threshold beyond which restoration will be very expensive or even impossible. Given the commitment for several actions to improve water quality through watershed restoration, the extensive Anacostia restoration program, and the Upper Rock Creek SPA, we believe the Olney Master Plan should recommend a comprehensive water quality plan and monitoring program for both the headwaters for the Northwest Branch of the Anacostia River in the South East Quadrant and for all of the North Branch of the Upper Rock Creek even if there is no impervious cap.
- ◆ With respect to the planning area share of affordable housing, we disagree with the staff's characterization that Olney is in the lower half of the range. There are many ways to look at an area's contribution to affordable housing. A recent report prepared for County Council<sup>1</sup> shows that Olney ranks fourth of the twenty planning areas in both the percent of the County's MPDUs located here (8.2%), and the percent of all area housing that is MPDUs (2.8%).

There is nothing in the plan to address the points that Commissioner Purdue and Commissioner Wellington raised on several occasions about looking at the big picture to determine if the plan achieves the best mix of uses for available land and allocates these uses in a balanced way. Are high-density uses located in transit-oriented centers? Are they balanced by appropriate amounts and placement of open space and recreational facilities for all age groups? Is there an appropriate mix of different types of affordable housing appropriately dispersed throughout the community? We would like to see their ideas reflected in the final recommendation.

Finally, there is nothing in the draft recommendation to indicate how, when, or if we will catch up from the infrastructure shortfalls that put us into moratorium before we open the spigot for more development in Southern Olney. We understand that under the old AGP the Master Plan determined land use and zoning and the AGP determined timing. However, with the loss of key elements from the AGP we feel it is appropriate to have a chapter in the master plan that recommends staging especially for schools.

Respectfully,



Nancy Wendt, On Behalf of The Olney Coalition

Copies:

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<sup>1</sup> "Strengthening the Moderately Priced Dwelling Unit Program: A 30-Year Review," A Report to the Montgomery County Council on Future Program and Policy Options, February 2004, page 3-3.