

January 30, 2004

To: Derick P. Berlage, Chairman
Montgomery County Planning Board

From: The Olney Coalition
Barbara Falcigno, Secretary

Re: Recommended Use of 32-Acre School Site on Bowie Mill Road

Dear Chairman Berlage:

I am writing to express the Olney Coalition's concern that the search for suitable locations for affordable housing and the DHCA's accelerated disposition process for surplus school sites have disrupted the normal community based master planning process.

As a result, the planning staff recommendation for the 32-acre school site on Bowie Mill Road, "If the property is not needed for educational purposes, it should be used for affordable housing", was developed without community input and without consideration of other needs or possible land uses. The Olney Coalition does not support this recommendation.

Throughout the MPAC discussions, the team lead believed this site would be a school. At some point between June 2003 and the release of the Public Hearing Draft in July 2003, the recommended use changed. There was no notification of this change in the land use recommendation to adjacent property owners and no alternative uses were assessed by the public.

The Olney Coalition is working with the planning staff to provide community input and to explore other possible uses. Right before the Christmas holiday, a survey was sent out to 300 homes in the neighborhoods surrounding the site (Norbeck Grove, Briar Acres, Olney Oaks, Olney Square, Olney Acres, Oatland Farms). We had a 23% response rate and have shared the results with staff. The results show that the most desirable use for this property is recreation and the least desirable use is housing.

We request the Planning Board close the gap regarding public input for this site by taking the following three actions.

- 1) Notify adjacent property owners of the change in recommended use.
- 2) Direct staff to evaluate other needs and alternative uses for this site.
- 3) Hold at least one well publicized meeting to involve the public in a discussion of alternative uses.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Barbara Falcigno
Secretary, Olney Coalition