



Greater Olney Civic Association

Post Office Box 212 Olney, Maryland 20830
www.goca.org

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Citizens Advisory
Board**

September 22, 2004

Via Facsimile

Hon. Steve Silverman
President
Montgomery County Council
100 Maryland Avenue
Rockville, Maryland 20850

Dear President Silverman:

GOCA and the Olney Coalition jointly submit this letter in response to your invitation last night to clarify our written and oral testimony concerning the Planning Board Draft of the Olney Master Plan. We have three main points.

First, lest our testimony left you with any false impressions, GOCA, the Olney Coalition and the tens of thousands of Olney residents we represent have always welcomed and will continue to welcome all to our community. GOCA is proud of the role it has played over time in helping to build a strong and diverse community with a quality of life that is unsurpassed in the county. The innovative 1980 Olney Master Plan that launched the county's TDR program produced a wide range of housing types, styles and affordability levels, including a large number of MPDUs. GOCA has always supported development projects that are consistent with the vision and guidelines of that plan. Conversely, GOCA has opposed developments, especially projects based on special exceptions, that dramatically deviate from – and therefore threaten the integrity of – the 1980 Plan and existing communities.

As we have worked to review and update the 1980 Plan, GOCA and the Olney Coalition have been mindful of the successful elements of that plan, particularly the concentric rings of decreasing density from the Town Center outward. We have therefore stressed that the next plan should encourage development that is generally consistent with existing surrounding neighborhoods, with new, high-density developments located close to the Town Center and its services and amenities.

Second, GOCA and the Olney Coalition are pleased and proud that Olney is the home of numerous elderly housing developments. The data concerning the number of elderly residents in Olney, the number of elderly housing units both in and near Olney, and whether Olney is providing its fair share of elderly housing – for the record, it is – speak for themselves but are beside the point.

Member Associations

Briars Acres
Brooke Manor Estates
Brookeville Knolls
Camelback Village
Cherrywood
Environ
Fairhill Farm
Hallowell
Highlands of Olney
Homeland Village
James Creek
Lake Hallowell
Norbeck Grove
Norbeck Meadows
North Creek
Oak Grove
Olney Mill
Olney Oaks
Olney Square
Olney Village
Perspective Woods
Southeast Rural Olney
Sycamore Acres
Tanterra
Towns at Environ
Victoria Springs

We welcome new elderly housing projects that make sense in terms of size, scale and location. For example, GOCA has supported the new 100-unit complex that is now under construction on Georgia Avenue in the Town Center, just north of Hillcrest Avenue. The Draft Plan's proposal for a new mixed-use zone in the Town Center should provide additional opportunities to build more such housing. GOCA and the Olney Coalition will continue to evaluate new proposals using the same criteria we have always employed, and will continue to support those that are sensible.

Third, GOCA's statement concerning HOC development on the 32-acre Bowie Mill Road site was imprecise and lacked context. It should have stated that GOCA strongly opposes any HOC development on that site of the type – *i.e.*, mixed use and extremely dense – that HOC has publicly espoused. GOCA's opposition has two principal bases:

- (1) Numerous statements, both public and private, by HOC have all indicated that HOC would prefer to build an extraordinarily dense, mixed-use development that would be wholly inconsistent with the master plan's intended use and the zoning for that parcel, and would be incompatible with surrounding neighborhoods. The Planning Board considered and rejected HOC's concept during its work sessions on the Draft Plan. Last night was the first time HOC has suggested that it may consider a less aggressive approach.
- (2) As Councilmember Praisner correctly observed, GOCA and the Olney community must take HOC's previous statements and concepts at face value because HOC developments are not constrained by the Zoning Ordinance or master plan guidelines. Once in motion, the community has little formal opportunity to comment on or shape HOC developments.

GOCA appreciates HOC's mission and certainly is not hostile to HOC developments per se. Olney is home to two HOC developments, Town Centre Place on Morningwood Drive in the Town Center and Pond Ridge along Old Baltimore Road in the northwest quadrant of Olney. GOCA certainly is not opposed to a new HOC development that, again, makes sense in terms of size, scale and location.

In conclusion, GOCA and the Olney Coalition believe the Draft Plan contains a thoughtful and responsible analysis of Olney's housing supply and potential, and we look forward to working with the Council to examine the Draft Plan's underlying data and conclusions. We believe they tell a remarkable story of success. We also believe you will find that the Draft Plan includes purposeful recommendations that, if properly implemented, will enable the Olney community to continue to build on that success during the life of the next Olney Master Plan.

Sincerely,

Steve Smet
President
GOCA

Nancy Wendt
President
The Olney Coalition

cc: Members of the Montgomery County Council
Hon. Derick P. Berlage, Montgomery County Planning Board