



COALITION FOR SMARTER GROWTH

April 8, 2010

Mr. Sam Parker
Chairman, Prince George's Planning Board
14741 Governor Oden Bowie Drive
Upper Marlboro, MD 20772

RE: Disapprove the DSP-06001/01 Commons at Addison Road (aka "The Icon") – require revisions to conform with the Addison Road Metro Town Center Pan design standards

Dear Chairman Parker:

Please accept these comments on behalf of the Coalition for Smarter Growth, a regional non-profit organization focused on ensuring transportation and development decisions accommodate growth while revitalizing communities, providing more housing and travel choices, and conserving our natural and historic areas.

We request that the board not approve the DSP as proposed but request a full revision of the "Commons at Addison Road" in order that ensure the project conform with transit- and pedestrian-oriented design standards in the Approved Sector Plan and Sectional Map Amendment for Addison Road Metro Town Center and Vicinity (ARM).

Strip mall design is inconsistent with ARM: While we agree that the proposed uses and the mix of uses is a public benefit to the site and community, we believe the project has a number of severe flaws. These flaws – its automobile-oriented design features, which ignore the Metro station across the street – are inconsistent with the Approved Sector Plan and Sectional Map Amendment for Addison Road Metro Town Center and Vicinity (ARM). This design approach is harmful to the Metro station area as it devalues the importance of pedestrian access to the Metro station and walkability in the community. This is a bad precedent that could have long-term negative effects on attracting truly transit-oriented development to the area.

The proposed building's main entrance "which is separated by a small surface parking facility in a courtyard design" and which is "set back a greater distance from Central Avenue to allow access to a surface parking facility in front of the building" violates the standards of the ARM. The ARM specifies that buildings should be placed at the sidewalk and that parking should be placed behind. The current proposed configuration of the building is a strip mall design, which is the antithesis of pedestrian-oriented design. The ARM's design standards would require the building placed at the corner of Central and Addison Road with doors opening onto sidewalks or public plazas rather than a gated retail surface parking lot.

Notably, the proposed aboveground parking garage with retail frontage is consistent with ARM design standards, and should establish the streetwall (build-to line) for the frontage on Addison Road.

Placement of stormwater pond on corner closest to Metro entrance blocks direct routes for pedestrians: The placement of the stormwater pond is also in the worst location from a transit-oriented design perspective. The stormwater pond sits at the most important corner of the property – the direct link to the front entrance of the Addison Road Metro station on Central Avenue.

Main pedestrian entrance appears to be the vehicle entrance 160 feet from direct route to Metro station: The apparent pedestrian transit for this project which is meant to be transit-oriented is at a vehicular driveway more than 160 feet from the intersection, and legal pedestrian crossing at Addison Road and Central Avenue.

Need for improved pedestrian facilities: The proposal provides several contributions or physical changes to expand vehicle traffic in the area. Similar investments in improving pedestrian movements are not provided. We ask the Planning Board to require enhanced crossings at Addison and Central Avenue – both to the Metro station entrance on Central Avenue and to the shopping center directly facing the project across Central Avenue. In general we are disappointed that greater attention was not given to improved pedestrian access and direct routes between the Metro station entrance and the front door of the retail on Central Avenue, along with nearby shopping and other destinations. We ask that safe and convenient pedestrian access be a focal point for transportation improvements for transit-oriented development as envisioned in the ARM.

The proposed design shows the existing unbuffered sidewalk on Central Avenue. We recommend ensuring that the sidewalk is buffered by a planting strip to improve the comfort and safety for pedestrians walking along Central Avenue in front of the building. We appreciate that the staff report recommends this as a condition. We ask that this condition be established and enforced.

The plan also shows incomplete sidewalks on the new access road on the property. We ask that 4 foot sidewalks on both sides of the street be required and connected to sidewalks on Zelma and Addison Road. We also suggest that this internal street be designed as a low-speed, narrow public street. The street can be used for drop-off by passenger vehicles for people accessing the building from the rear, and can be used by drivers originating from Zelma who wish to turn right onto Addison Road. This diverts vehicle trips from the major intersection.

Six foot high fence harms rather than helps security and undermines retail success: We recognize the intention of the six-foot high fence on the buildings' fronts on Central Avenue and Addison Road is intended to increase security. However, concerns about vehicle theft are best addressed by offering secure parking in the garage, rather than fencing a retail surface parking lot. Building security is not enhanced by a fence around retail parking. Building and parking garage security are enhanced by effective door and window locks, effective secure entrance and exit systems that control access for residents and visitors, and on-site security personnel and parking lot attendants.

Fencing a retail parking lot in front of the building has several negative effects. First it causes the retail to appear separated and inaccessible from the roadway so that potential customers are less likely to visit, whether passing by car or on foot. Second, the fence isolates walkers on the sidewalk on Central Avenue and increases their sense of vulnerability as they are shut out of the activities occurring at the stores and entrances of the building. A better solution for securing the front of the building is to configure it as the parking garage with retail frontage is configured – bring the building up to the sidewalk, and put the parking in the rear – in an attended garage if necessary. Note that there is no need for a fence in front of stores that wrap the garage. These store entrances meet the sidewalk, offering security to passersby.

Bringing storefronts to the sidewalk, as established in the ARM garage building creates a safer sense of

place for Central Avenue – rather than being fenced off from it – it meets the public space with watchful eyes of store owners and residents. Further ways to improve security and create a safer and more walkable environment can be found in the field of “crime prevention through environmental design.”

Transitional heights of building: We recommend that building highs taper down to better meet the residential street context of Zelma, with the highest portions of the building closest to Central Avenue and Addison Road. Given that the Addison Road Metro station is designated as a community center in the General Plan, we question the overall scale of this building for such a center.

LEED Silver Certification: We commend the developer for publically announcing his intention to achieve LEED Silver certification for the project. We suggest that the Planning Board make this a condition of approval.

Conclusion

We want to restate that we strongly support the mixed uses proposed in this project. What is such a problem is the design and pedestrian access. Once these significant problems are corrected, this project can be a great contribution to the community and the county.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Cheryl Cort
Policy Director