



Testimony

Rockville Pike's Neighborhood Plan

May 16, 2016

Good evening, my name is Pete Tomao and I'm the Montgomery Advocacy Manager for the Coalition for Smarter Growth. We are a 19-year-old organization founded by the region's leading environmental groups and the leading non-profit addressing the interconnected issues of land use, transportation, housing and the environment. We support walkable, transit-oriented development as the most sustainable way for our region to grow.

The Rockville's Pike Neighborhood Plan contains all of the components of a more sustainable community including a street grid, commitment to complete streets, a mix-of-uses, public spaces and parks. We have two primary concerns about the proposed plan: the width proposed for Rockville Pike and the reduction in building heights near Twinbrook Metro Station. Our partners at the Sierra Club, including local resident Ethan Goffman raised these issues in 2014 and again this evening.

We appreciate your commitment to the redesign of Rockville Pike in Twinbrook, to make the road an urban main street and a better place for transit, bicycling and walking. However, at 252 feet, the proposed Pike is simply too wide and will be a barrier to pedestrians. It will prevent creation of a unified transit-oriented community on both sides of the Pike. The Pike should match the design in Montgomery County's White Flint plan which calls for a 216 foot wide boulevard, with 162 feet for cars, buses and bikes and a 27 foot-wide sidewalks on each side. Your plan includes a good street grid, including streets parallel to Rockville Pike. This grid will allow for good circulation and eliminate the need for the proposed access roads on Rockville Pike. By making Rockville Pike too wide in the plan, you could stymie the very redevelopment you seek to attract, by rendering it not economically viable for landowners to redevelop.

Restricting the heights to 10 stories near Twinbrook Metro could have the same effect. Given that most of the southern portion of your planning area falls within ½ mile of the metro station, that areas just west of Rockville Pike are within ¼ mile of the station, and that there is plenty of space available to step down the garden apartments and single family homes to the west, we believe that locations within ¼ mile should be eligible for heights above 10 stories. By building up, you create the possibility for dedication of land for public squares and provision of other public benefits, including 15% of units as MPDU's.

We note concerns about traffic and adequate public facilities that are expressed in the plan. But it is the shift to compact mixed-use, walkable and transit-oriented development which will contribute the most to reducing long-distance vehicle travel and reducing congestion. Every person who lives and works in a transit-oriented center can contribute to reducing vehicle trips. You should not focus on accommodating long distance vehicle travel but on creating economically vibrant centers that reward people for living and working in walkable and transit-oriented centers. Therefore, we recommend against use of critical lane volumes and instead use measures that better account for walking, biking and transit use.

In terms of schools, recent data from Montgomery County shows that TOD generates fewer children per unit than some anticipated. We have also heard that the recent boom in school age populations is beginning to abate in the region. Certainly we should provide great schools, but permitting additional development near Twinbrook Metro can generate the revenues you need to expand and add schools. Compact, higher-density development generates many times the tax revenue per acre than does single family and townhouse development.

The market demand for walkable TOD shows no signs of abating. Young people and downsizing empty nesters are among the leading demographics seeking these communities. Major corporations like Marriott are looking to leave office parks in favor of Metro stations. And, if we wish to protect our environment then TOD is the way to go. It provides more energy efficient buildings, reduces auto travel and greenhouse gas emissions, and makes the private sector a partner in retrofitting modern stormwater management in places where there are no controls today.

Therefore, we urge you to modify the plan to shrink the cross-section of Rockville Pike and to support greater height within the $\frac{1}{4}$ mile around Twinbrook Metro, stepping down to $\frac{1}{2}$ mile.

Thank you.