



July 16, 2019

The Hon. Elizabeth M. Hewlett, Chairman
Prince George's County Planning Board
14741 Governor Oden Bowie Drive
Upper Marlboro, MD 20772

Re: Deny the proposed Item #9. DSP-19008 WESTPHALIA CENTER (SNAPPER), and Item #10.
DDS-657 WESTPHALIA CENTER (SNAPPER)

Dear Chair Hewlett and members of the Board:

Please accept these comments on behalf of the Coalition for Smarter Growth. The Coalition for Smarter Growth is the leading organization in the Washington, D.C. region dedicated to making the case for smart growth. Our mission is to promote walkable, inclusive, and transit-oriented communities, and the land use and transportation policies and investments needed to make those communities flourish.

We are writing to request the Board to deny the proposed Detailed Site Plan (DSP) for Westphalia Center (Snapper). This proposed DSP is clearly not compliant with the Westphalia Sector Plan or the Plan Prince George's 2035 Approved General Plan. The proposed industrial land use for the site will not fulfill the intent of these plans, which specify that uses should create a mixed-use, walkable town center.

The staff report states that the DSP supports the purposes of the M-X-T zone:

[(2)] To implement recommendations in the approved General Plan, Master Plans, and Sector Plans, by creating compact, mixed-use, walkable communities enhanced by a mix of residential, commercial, recreational, open space, employment, and institutional uses;

Phase I included residential uses only, and this DSP is for a merchandise logistics center, which will add a major employment use that is walkable to the remainder of the town center. As one of the phases of a larger mixed-use development, this DSP will help to create a compact, mixed-use, and walkable neighborhood, including a mix of residential, commercial, recreational, open space, employment, and institutional uses as anticipated in the approved CSP-07004-02.

It strains credulity to assert that a 19-acre monolithic warehouse building, measuring 1,198 feet by 558 feet, surrounded by 1,800 surface parking spaces is contributing to a compact, walkable, mixed-use town center. The staff suggests that the current forested site, adjacent to a residential use could be accessed on foot. However, no pedestrian pathway from the residential development to the proposed building is indicated in the plans. There is no illustration of how a pedestrian would walk across the woodland buffer and the expansive surface parking lot to a door of the large building. In addition, the main truck route to and from the loading docks – with 18-wheel trucks day and night -- would cut between the warehouse and existing residential community at Westphalia. This is a mammoth warehouse and distribution center – it is not a component of a mixed-use, walkable, urban community in any way.

The staff report notes that:

On June 18, 2019, the District Council adopted and enacted Prince George's County Council Bills CB-018-2019 and CB-019-2019; CB-018-2019 for the purpose of adding a definition of a merchandise logistics center and amending the definition of regional urban community in the Zoning Ordinance; and CB-019-2019 for the purpose of amending the regulations of the M-X-T Zone.

This substantial change to the M-X-T zone is contrary to the intent of the M-X-T zone to create mixed-use, walkable, urban communities which would match the success of similar communities in other jurisdictions across the region, and as noted above, is contrary to the intent of both the Westphalia Sector Plan and the county's 2035 General Plan.

The key to the county's economic development, particularly in higher paying jobs, is to support and promote walkable, mixed-use, urban centers. Once the county committed to Westphalia as a mixed-use center, a vision promised to the current residents of the first phase, the county must stick with that commitment. Changing the M-X-T zone to allow warehouses and distribution centers will undermine the value of both existing and future mixed-use centers, because no developer, small business, or residential buyer could count on their investment retaining its value. While the County Council may have amended definitions for the M-X-T zone, the DSP must still conform to town center characteristics described and defined in the Westphalia Plan and the General Plan.

We recognize the need for industrial and distribution jobs, but there are other locations available for the proposed distribution center that would have less impact on an existing residential and mixed-use community. One such location is the identically-sized, 80-acre old Landover Mall site at the Capital Beltway interchange with MD 202, which we understand is for sale.

We urge the Board to reject the current proposal. We ask the Board to encourage such uses in more appropriate locations to utilize existing transportation infrastructure and to promote uses more in line with the County's long-term development goals. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Cheryl Cort
Policy Director