Coalition for Smarter Growth
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January 18, 2022

The Hon. Calvin S. Hawkins, II
Prince George's County District Council Chair

Elizabeth M. Hewlett
Chairman of the Prince George's County Planning Board
County Administration Building
14741 Governor Oden Bowie Drive Upper Marlboro, Maryland 20772
Email: clerkofthecouncil@co.pg.md.us

RE: Preliminary Adelphi Road-UMGC-UMD Purple Line Station Area Sector Plan and Proposed Sectional Map Amendment (SMA) (CR-123-2020)

Dear County Council Chair Hawkins and Planning Board Chair Hewlett:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony regarding the Preliminary Adelphi Road-UMGC-UMD Purple Line Station Area Sector Plan and Proposed Sectional Map Amendment (SMA), or the "Adelphi Sector Plan."

Please accept these comments on behalf of the Coalition for Smarter Growth, the leading non-profit organization in the D.C. region advocating for walkable, bikeable, inclusive, transit-oriented communities as the most sustainable and equitable way for the DC region to grow and provide opportunities for all. CSG has been working in Prince George's County for many years. We have been working with community members and organizations to win great places around transit, better transit service, and walkable/bikeable, connected and inclusive communities in Prince George's County. These qualities build better lives for Prince George's families and a stronger tax base for the county. We are currently collaborating with Prince George's residents and allies in a group called RISE Prince George's, which recently issued an issues platform (available here).

The following testimony reflects the views of the Coalition for Smarter Growth.

We wish to express our overall support for the vision and key policies for the Adelphi Sector Plan. This plan will reshape this Purple Line station area into a mixed-use westside University of Maryland campus center. We are excited that the Purple Line, despite many bumps, is on its way, and are eager to make the most of this by ensuring all stations provide increased access to jobs, services and homes, in a way that minimizes automobile trips and reduces greenhouse gas emissions from transportation.

We agree with the overall vision of this sector plan and find it succinctly stated in the land use element:

- Create a high-intensity, mixed-use, pedestrian-oriented, and university- and transit-supportive neighborhood at the Adelphi Road-UMGC-UMD Purple Line Station Area (UMD West Campus Center). Discourage non-transit-supportive or automobile-oriented uses.
- Preserve key publicly owned natural areas to preserve environmental assets and create buffers between the Core and adjacent neighborhoods. (ARSP Preliminary Plan Final, Page 12)

Some nearby residents have expressed objections to this station area/Western Campus Center as a site for medium density mixed-use housing, with proposed rezoning to the Local Transit Oriented (LTO) zone. However, we believe that the overall approach by the plan is the correct one for such an important, emerging transit station area and Western Campus Center. We agree with staff that the LTO zone is more appropriate than the Neighborhood Activity Center (NAC) zone or low density residential, or the higher density Regional Transit-Oriented zone (RTO).

Nearby residents and members of the university community have also expressed concerns about preservation of Guilford Woods, Guilford Run, and flooding in the areas. However, we believe that a compromise can be found by shifting some of the new housing away from an enlarged forested conservation area, ensuring a good riparian buffer, and using best management practices for stormwater, while retaining a similar number of new housing units.

The new housing opportunities, and supporting retail, are the leading environmental feature of the plan. These new housing opportunities mean that potentially thousands of staff and students can live close to their offices and avoid long commutes and polluting vehicle trips. The attractive combination of walking distance to the University of Maryland campus, and access to the Purple Line, along with local serving retail, makes this plan area an ideal site for substantial amounts of new housing. Given the constrained amount of affordable, quality graduate student housing, we view this area as especially important for university-supported affordable housing for students.

Making the most of this plan area with sufficient amounts of new housing is also an important contribution to reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions of county residents. We calculate that Purple Line/(Local Transit Center) Metro station areas have 19% lower GHG emissions per household than the County average and 30% lower emissions than outlying town centers. So enabling more people to live here dramatically reduces their carbon footprint.

Below, we provide more detailed comments.

Housing

We support the policy goals to "construct a range of housing units affordable to students, employees, and seniors at transit-supportive densities," (ARSP, Page 93)

We support the housing demand assessment, given that the MWCOG household projections for the area are "overly conservative," (ARSP Market Study Report, Page 17). We agree that the market demand number of overall units – 2,600 residential units -- is a good benchmark, and

should be planned around the physical fit of the new multifamily homes, given the constraints from expanding the riparian buffer and preserving more of Guilford Woods. While the 2,600 units might be projected for the larger market area, what's clear is that this small plan area is the premium location for new housing, and should be prioritized.

More specifically, we recommend that zoning capacity for the planned and proposed housing units (Mosaic at Turtle Creek and Western Gateway) be shifted from the southern portion of University-owned parcel 29 to expand the preservation of Guilford Woods, and widen the buffer area along the stream. This is likely to require greater flexibility in building height for the rest of the site and area closer to the station and the commercial main streets (Campus Dr. and Mowatt Lane) in order to reduce the footprint of new housing that would otherwise encroach on the expanded conservation area.

Expanded housing options with accessory dwellings -- While largely outside the boundaries of this small sector plan area, we suggest that the plan recommend development of accessory dwelling unit zoning regulations for the surrounding single family zones. Given the many adjacent large lot single family properties, an accessory rental unit could easily be accommodated on the property and further increase and diversify the housing options so close to campus.

Expand the plan area boundaries – The small size of the sector plan is surprising given the significance of the arrival of a Purple Line station. At minimum, the plan should consider Lot 1 surface parking lot and the University of Maryland Global Campus. These sites form the major northern parcels of the Purple Line station area. Lot 1 in particular is ripe for redevelopment since it is a surface lot, and could be contributing to runoff problems in the plan area. Both these university sites should be integrated into a plan that is attempting to comprehensively lay out the uses around the new Purple Line station.

Transportation

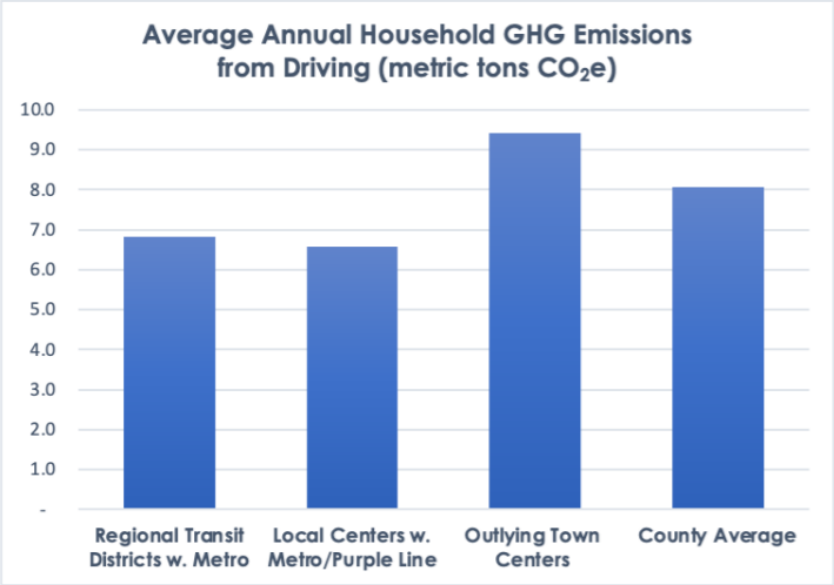
Intersection of Adelphi Road, University Blvd. and Campus Drive – while the plan recognizes that this intersection is problematic, the plan should call for urgent attention to fixing this intersection in order to create safe walk/bike access to the new light rail station and University of Maryland. The plan should recommend both short term and long term changes to the intersection. Quick-build interventions to narrow cross sections are needed, but longer term solutions such as one or more roundabouts, are needed to make the area safer and accessible.

Parking & Transportation Demand Management (TDM)

Given the significance of this area – as both a Purple Line station area, and a node housing for to meet strong demand from the University of Maryland (the county's largest employer) – the plan should call for a stronger Transportation Demand Management (TDM) planning approach that includes further reducing vehicle parking, and encouraging the sharing of existing parking spaces on campus for any university-related uses. The location currently has a phenomenal 22% walk to work rate reflecting the benefit of more housing close to jobs and classes. With further

encouragement through stronger parking reductions, and vehicle trip reduction strategies, walk and bike to work rates could be even higher. This would benefit residents who are seeking to live close to campus in exchange for avoiding long car commutes and the costs of car ownership. A strong parking reduction and TDM program would also greatly reduce greenhouse gas emissions (see CSG's analyses of significant reductions in greenhouse gas emissions from transit-oriented developments and plans here, here and here).

Our recent analysis comparing greenhouse gas emissions from driving for households located in Purple Line station areas and inside the beltway Metro station areas (Local Transit Centers), versus households in outer town centers, showed that these transit station areas offer households the most reduction to GHG emissions.[1] They have 19% lower GHG emissions per household than the county average and 30% lower emissions than outlying town centers.



Note: "Outlying Town Centers" includes Konterra, Bowie Town Center, Westphalia, and Brandywine.
Source: Vehicle miles traveled estimates from H+T Affordability Index, accessed April 2021. VMT-GHG emission factor from USEPA Greenhouse Gases Equivalencies Calculator, 2019.

Source: Coalition for Smarter Growth, April 2021. Prince George's County Climate Action Plan Recommended Transportation & Land Use GHG Mitigation Strategies.

Street connectivity – we support the plan's vision for an interconnected network of complete and green streets. This network is essential to reducing driving trips, and encouraging more walk and bicycle trips. An effective low-speed local street network also enables shorter vehicle trips that are more compatible with a transit-oriented and active transportation environment. The interconnected network is an important emissions reduction component that reduces vehicle trips, length of vehicle trips, and greenhouse gas emissions.

[1] We have asked MNCPPC staff to provide this kind of VMT/GHG analysis for the Adelphi Sector Plan area. We have also requested, but have not received, the data needed to do the analysis from the University of Maryland Sustainable Transportation program.

Improved connectivity throughout the plan area will also help the campus community and users of the plan area have access to the larger network of nearby parks and open space.

Natural Environment

We recommend strengthening the green infrastructure components by widening the riparian buffer along Guilford Run, and increasing the area of the Guilford Woods set aside for conservation. Fuller assessments regarding current and future potential flooding should also be added to this section. Expanding these natural areas also serves to buffer the transit-scaled development from nearby low density residential properties. While this plan area is a premium location for climate-friendly, transit-accessible housing at the western gateway of the county's largest employer, the enhanced stream protections, and greater tree canopy preservation, and further assessment of flood mitigation provide important local benefits to the natural and built environment.

We recommend including Lot 1 in assessments of stormwater management and flooding concerns in the area. Lot 1 would ideally be included in scenarios that would both add mixed-used development and contribute to improved stormwater runoff controls that would better address local flooding impacts.

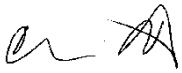
We request that any discussion about county actions to mitigate climate change recognize the importance of increasing housing opportunities and a mix of uses around major transit and employment hubs. Our research demonstrates that providing more homes around Purple Line stations allows nearby households to reduce their carbon footprint compared to the county's average GHG emissions per household. Given the specific sector plan location – where even now, 22% of workers walk to work – we expect even greater reductions in GHG emissions reductions per household at this location. This should be recognized as a key benefit of this plan.

Conclusion

We believe that this sector plan can be amended to increase and strengthen the forest and riparian buffer protection, while providing for more critically needed housing, and that the medium-density plan with LTO zoning is the best approach. This Purple Line station next to the University of Maryland's flagship campus offers a key opportunity to increase the quality of life for residents, students, and employees, while simultaneously shrinking their carbon footprint.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Cheryl Cort
Policy Director