

**CITIZEN
CORRESPONDENCE**

Woodmoor-Pinecrest Citizens Association

January 29, 2006

Ms. Cathy Conlon
Supervisor, Development Review
Subdivision Division
Maryland-National Capital
Park & Planning Commission
8787 Georgia Avenue
Silver Spring, Maryland 20910-3760

Re: Montgomery County
Bank of America/Woodmoor
Preliminary Plan #1-06046

Dear Ms. Conlon:

We appreciate the opportunity to provide comments on the proposal to re-site the Bank of America within the Woodmoor Shopping Center. We note the long tenure of the bank as a commercial partner and its continuing integral role within the Woodmoor community.

We have reviewed the materials provided us by the applicant, M-NP&PC staff and the State Highway Administration. We want to acknowledge the efforts of two community members, Paul Manchester and Eileen Emmet, who participated in the planning sessions and have kept the Association informed.

At our meeting January 25th 2006 the Association met and considered the proposed development. While there is no debate on the positive role the Bank of America will continue to play in the Community, we are concerned about the impacts of the internal routing of traffic within the shopping center and especially around the proposed location of the bank itself. We are also concerned about the additional impacts of traffic on an already stressed Lexington Drive and the adjacent section of University Boulevard from Lexington to the curb cut on the south side of the shopping center.

We bank there, some of us work there, yet we're not convinced that we have done the best we can do to serve the community or customers accessing the bank or the shopping center. As a result, the Community does not support the proposed configuration of the bank without modification.

At the planning meetings we attended we heard the comment that since many of the impacts occur offsite, the effects of the impacts should not be part of the consideration of this proposal. Our position is just the opposite. Since there are already-existing impacts that will be aggravated by this on-site development, mitigation should be considered, recommended, and implementation mandated at the site development review.

During one of the coordination meetings with planning staff, the community laid out its concerns with the proposal. During this meeting, community members and urban planning staff worked together to suggest improvements to the operation of the site. One

of those suggestions, for example, was to circulate traffic in a counterclockwise circulation only around the bank structure. One-way circulation would reduce contention on a cramped site, and would eliminate attempts at a left turn exit from the Bank to the University Boulevard curb-cut.

Unfortunately, we have no indication that any of these suggested improvements by M-NP&PC urban planning staff were considered by the developer. The Community has continuing concerns about the internal routing of traffic within and around the bank that remain unaddressed. Some of these are not expensive to implement. We note that there is currently no traffic exit guides. Internal shopping center way-finding signs should guide drivers to exit paths that will lead them to eastbound, southbound, westbound and northbound traffic directions in a safe, non-disruptive manner.

Lexington Drive

The Community supports the additional exit lane on Lexington because it may partially alleviate the queuing on Lexington by providing a double stack. However, the double lane as shown will not solve and may exacerbate an eastbound traffic weave exiting the shopping center.

The proposed no left turn restriction from Lexington Drive into the shopping center would partially mitigate some of the stress on Lexington, but that restriction will shift turning movement traffic from University Boulevard into the shopping center via the curb cut directly off University. As an increasingly important primary access point into the shopping center, this curb cut now warrants special attention.

University Boulevard Curb Cut

Exiting traffic must contend with limited sight distance, making a safe exit, even into the adjacent travel lane where oncoming traffic can quickly overtake a slow-moving vehicle, perilous. In addition, there is currently no internal way finding information to drivers exiting the shopping center to guide drivers who intend to go southbound on Route 29. As a result, drivers attempt an even more perilous exit movement, crossing four travel lanes of University Boulevard traffic to access the left turn lane in order to proceed south on Route 29.

At this same curb cut, westbound pedestrians who are attempting to negotiate the curb cut are confronted with a situation where they must simultaneously be aware of traffic that may be turning in to the shopping center behind them, while at the same time avoiding exiting traffic immediately in front of them. Therefore, at that curb cut, we recommend consideration of a small sidewalk median separating right-in right-out movements that will discourage cross travel lane movement to exiting traffic, and guiding exiting traffic westward across the main intersection. This small sidewalk median will provide a pedestrian safe island that allows the pedestrian to distinguish and deal with the two threats separately instead of contending with both at the same time. Since this is a designated pedestrian pathway for Blair and St. Bernadette's students from the

Northwood Community as well as a general pathway for pedestrians, it is important that our curb cut-sidewalk configuration mitigate contention between pedestrian and vehicle.

In general, the Community's pedestrian access to the site is hindered by lack of an internal access plan. Specific to the bank proposal, there is no good sidewalk access to the shopping center from Lexington Drive.

Bus Stops

There are two bus stops on University Boulevard immediate adjacent to the subject site. A Metrobus only stop (Routes C2 and C4 westbound) is located just east of Lexington Drive. An additional stop on University Boulevard near the south side of the shopping center is a combination MC Ride-On (Route 9 westbound) and Metrobus stop (Route C2 and C4 westbound). Although implementation of the Blair Pedestrian Plan provided a pedestrian crossing across University Boulevard, the Plan did not anticipate the behavior of students who use Metrobus to travel to Blair. Upon exiting the bus, we observe that most students do not cross Lexington to use the designated crosswalk. Instead, upon exiting the bus, students immediately cross University Boulevard toward Blair, filtering through the stopped west-bound traffic that is waiting for the traffic signal to change on the east side of the Lexington-University intersection. If the traffic signal cycles to green during this maneuver, the students scramble to evade the now-accelerating traffic. We have been lucky so far, but this situation is inherently unsafe.

Therefore, we recommend consolidation of the two Metrobus stops into one, located on University Boulevard between Lexington Drive and the shopping center curb cut. This location would serve all pedestrians by providing access to the shopping center, the designated crosswalk to Blair, and the proposed sidewalk into the Woodmoor community. There is no existing or proposed sidewalk on the east side of Lexington Drive serving the existing stop. Consolidation will also eliminate one of two existing stops currently positioned very close together. The Ride-On stop (Route 9 westbound) may have to remain in its current location, because the bus may not be able to complete its turning movement from the jughandle onto University Boulevard before it reaches the stop.

We appreciate the opportunity to work with you to continue to make Woodmoor a great place to shop, work and live! If you have any questions, feel free to contact me or Mike Pfetsch.

Sincerely,

Byrne Peak
President

November 7, 2005
Development Review Committee

Re: Bank of America Plan at Woodmoor Shopping Center

The proposed project is located at the main entry/exit to a large section of homes in the Woodmoor neighborhood, at University Boulevard and Lexington Avenues. This is the only location where a traffic light is located. The traffic light does not allow right-turn-on-red, and therefore residents have longer wait times than normal to leave the neighborhood. The two other streets that exit this section, Lorain Avenue and Crestmoor Drive, do not have traffic lights at Colesville Road, and are extremely difficult to cross to go any direction other than north, and even then, the speed and volume of traffic going north also makes it difficult to go north with ease.

With this and other issues in mind, please consider the following concerns when reviewing the project.

Traffic-related issues:

- 1) Traffic studies should be comprehensive, not only to measure which entry/exit vehicles are using at the rear shopping center parking lot, but for impacts at Colesville intersections at Crestmoor, Lorain, and Timberwood, and University intersections at Lexington, the jug-handle, and Colesville. These are some observations:
 - a) At rush hours, and sometimes beyond depending on the weather, the traffic on University Boulevard backs up from Colesville Road past Lexington Avenue. This prevents 1) exiting from the shopping center lot behind Kugler's and 2) exiting from Lexington Avenue onto or across University.
 - b) The University/Lexington Avenue traffic light allows right-turn-on-red from University onto Lexington. During rush hour, vehicles do not wait in traffic to enter the shopping center lot beyond; they instead turn right on Lexington and left into the Lexington shopping center entry. This poses difficulties for vehicles lining up to exit the neighborhood, because delays caused by letting vehicles cut across the exit line, to enter the shopping lot, causes additional delays. (Vehicles exiting the shopping center onto Lexington towards University also cut across the Lexington exit line.)
 - c) Vehicles exiting the shopping center generally do not exit directly onto University behind Kugler's. This may be because there are five lanes of traffic on University to cross to go south on Colesville or west on University. It may also be because the lot is sloped in such a way that visibility is poor and/or because vehicles backing up from Colesville do not allow cars to cut into the line.
 - d) There is a large amount of non-resident traffic cutting through the neighborhood to avoid the Four Corners jug-handle intersections. Vehicles heading west on University turn right onto Lexington, left onto Pierce, left onto Timberwood, to take a right onto Colesville north. This is a regular, steady occurrence during rush hour and has also been observed to occur regularly on weekends. This occurs in the opposite direction too, starting from Colesville south, turning left onto Timberland, heading east on University.

Woodmoor Shopping Center
Development Review Committee
November 7, 2005

- 2) Drive up lanes do not encourage to get out of their cars, therefore encouraging higher of volumes of vehicular customers. How do volumes at drive-up windows compare to volumes at other quick-serve businesses, such as fast food restaurants or gas stations, located so close to a major countywide intersection?
- 3) The plan shows Lexington Avenue being widened at University. There is only a short distance between the parking lot entry/exit and the light at University, and it would seem a wider exit lane may make it more confusing to choose which lane to be in such a short turning distance, particularly if no right-on-red is available.

Parking Lot issues:

- 1) The plan shows a waiver of a number of parking spaces. This may not be reasonable considering that dumpsters will have to be relocated and may cause more spaces to be taken away.
- 2) If the parking spaces around the new building are for bank customers only, this could compromise an opportunity to solve the overall limited parking issues at the shopping center.
- 3) The parking lot slopes significantly around the location of the new building. These slopes compromise visibility of pedestrians walking to the shopping center's rear entrance. Careful attention should be paid to how pedestrians will enter/exit the parking lot from the neighborhood.
- 4) Sidewalks should be located so additional volumes of vehicles entering/exiting the parking lot will be less likely to cross their path to enter the bank because a number of residents may be bank customers doing errands on foot, or combining visits to other stores.

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July 15, 2004

Paul B. Manchester
105 Lexington Drive
Silver Spring, MD 20901
(301) 593-5699

Mr. Reginald T. Jetter
Department of Permitting Services
Division Chief, Casework Management
255 Rockville Pike, 2nd Floor
Rockville, MD 20850

Dear Mr. Jetter:

I am the Chair of the Shopping Center Committee for the Woodmoor Pinecrest Citizens Association (WPCA). Our community is bounded by University Boulevard East, Colesville Road, Northwest Branch, and the Beltway, and lies directly behind the Woodmoor Shopping Center (Center).

I am writing with regard to the proposed move of the Bank of America branch from its current site in the Center to a pad site near the corner of Lexington Drive and University Boulevard. This proposal was presented in outline form at the April meeting of the WPCA by representatives of Bank of America and First Washington Realty, the managers of the Center.

The actual plans for this proposed move were submitted to you by Emily Vaiss, Esq., on May 27, 2004, and revised on July 9, 2004. The WPCA has not voted on these plans because they were submitted after our May meeting, the last regular meeting until September. But based on the generally favorable response to the proposal at our April meeting and my subsequent discussions with members of the community, including those living near the site, I believe that a majority of the WPCA community supports this proposal, which would provide enhanced financial services to community members, as well as others.

Despite our general support for this proposal, we do have concerns about the adequacy of parking at the Center if this is approved. In particular, we are concerned about parking on neighborhood streets on Saturdays, the peak demand period for the Center. Overflow parking could be mitigated if the manager of the Center encourages employees to park elsewhere during this period, and if the manager closely monitors parking to ensure that only shoppers are parked at the Center. And in general, we believe that no further parking waivers should be granted beyond that requested by First Washington as part of this proposal. We also believe that adequate landscaping is essential to ensure that this proposed Bank of America branch does not adversely affect the residential nature of the adjoining properties.

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Additional matters related to this proposal were presented in the June 22 memorandum sent to you by Sarah Navid, at the June 30 hearing, and in Ms. Vaias's letter of July 9. Based on my discussions with community members, I believe that a majority supports the changes in the July 9 letter, which would improve the flow of traffic in the Center, relocate and enclose the dumpsters, and provide for the removal of the tree on Lexington Drive.

In her June 22 memorandum, Ms. Navid suggested that the portion of Lexington Drive between the Center and University Boulevard (approximately 100 feet in length) be widened to three lanes, with one lane for right turns onto University Boulevard and one lane for left turns. We believe that this proposal would benefit residents by reducing the lines of cars backed up on Lexington Drive at this intersection and by allowing more cars to exit onto University Boulevard during the short green light. Concerns have been expressed that addition of a third lane could increase the flow of cut-through traffic in our community, but hopefully steps will be taken by Montgomery County and/or the Maryland State Highway Administration to reduce this problem. It might be possible to add a third lane without moving all of the utility poles currently located on that portion of Lexington Drive, which would reduce the cost of this proposal.

In closing, I wish to reiterate our support for this proposed relocation of the Bank of America branch in the Woodmoor Shopping Center.

Sincerely,



Paul B. Manchester

cc: Jae Collins, President, WPCA
Mike Pfetsch, Vice President, WPCA
Ronda Kent, Treasurer, WPCA
Sarah Navid, DPS
Emily Vaias, Esq.