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Subject: Ashton Village Sector Plan Public Hearing Testimony
Date: Wednesday, September 16, 2020 12:12:16 PM
Attachments: [Public Hearing Testimony.docx](#)

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Attached please find the testimony from the Spring Lawn Farm Homeowners Association for the September 17 Public Hearing on the Ashton Village Center Sector Plan.

Kathleen Wheeler
President, Spring Lawn Farm HOA

This testimony is submitted on behalf of the Spring Lawn Farm Homeowners' Association. Spring Lawn Farm is on the west side of New Hampshire Avenue just south of the intersection of New Hampshire Avenue and Route 108. Our development is about 30 years old and consists of approximately 60 single family homes. Residents range in age from less than a year to over 90 years old. We have residents who are the original owners of their homes as well as three young families who moved in since the first of the year.

Most of us came from others parts of Montgomery County. We came because Ashton was different than other places in the County. We love the small town feel that is hard to find in the Washington area, as well as nearby working farms and historic Sandy Spring.

Today, Ashton is at a crossroads—both literally and figuratively. The implementation of the Ashton Village Sector Plan will determine the future for our community. Will it preserve Ashton's unique rural and historic character or will Ashton become just one more suburban community? Will the intersection of Route 108 and New Hampshire Avenue finally get improved or will it just be further clogged and unsafe as a result of intense development on its southeast corner?

While the Plan before you has many good things we support, there are also areas of concern.

First, the provisions that we support.

- An implementation advisory committee
- Safe sidewalks and sidepaths where they are missing.
- Crosswalks and pedestrian signals across all parts of the intersection of Route 108 and New Hampshire at the village center.
- Intersection improvements, including moving the pole at the corner of New Hampshire Avenue and Route 108, without expanding the overall size of the intersection.
- Expansion of the hiking and biking network in the area.
- Provision of signage that connects the village center to historic and cultural resources of the greater Ashton community.

Each of these provisions are critical and long overdue. While the Spring Lawn Farm neighborhood is within close proximity to the bank, post office, and various businesses in Ashton, there is no sidewalk or sidepath or crosswalks with signals that enable us to walk there safely.

The biggest concern that we have with the Plan is the development on the southeast corner because of its proximity to our neighborhood. The entrance to our neighborhood is less than one tenth of a mile from the southern edge of the property to be developed on the southeast corner. Some of the homes in our HOA back to a row of houses directly across New Hampshire Avenue from the southeast corner property. We will be directly impacted by the traffic, noise, and light pollution generated by this development.

Development on the southeast corner of the intersection of New Hampshire Avenue and Route 108 has been an issue dating back to prior to the development of the 1998 Sandy Spring Ashton

Master Plan. That Plan included language that specifically prohibited townhouses on the parcels at that corner. Subsequent to its adoption, plans for the mixed-use Ashton Meeting development were approved in 2008 and included six single family homes and commercial space. With the zoning recommended in the draft Plan under consideration, the potential number of units could be 20-25 times the number approved in 2008 with height limits that exceed those of the surrounding development on adjacent corners of the intersection as well as single family homes that border the property. This level of development will overrun the already overtaxed infrastructure in Ashton.

Traffic backs up on Route 108 and New Hampshire Avenue during the morning and evening rush hours, as well as when Sherwood High School dismisses students in the afternoon. Being just south of this intersection, cars back up past the entrance to our neighborhood as far as you can see south on New Hampshire Avenue. While it can take less than ten minutes to get to or from Olney during non-rush hours, it can take well over 20 minutes in the afternoon when traffic can back up almost into Olney. In the morning when school is in session, it can take two to three lights cycles to turn left from New Hampshire Avenue to go west on Route 108 towards Olney.

The Plan suggests that dependence on cars for residents of the new development could be mitigated by expansion of RideOn or Metrobus routes. Earlier this year, the Washington Area Metropolitan Transit Authority proposed as part of its 2021 budget the elimination of several bus routes, including the single bus route that serves Ashton only at rush hours during the week. This proposal was not included in the final 2021 budget due to efforts of the County Council and the State Delegation. Given the current state of ridership on RideOn busses and the County resources, expansion of RideOn bus service is highly unlikely in the near future. As a result, new residents will be primarily dependent on cars for transportation.

Most households in this area have at least two cars and in our neighborhood, about one-third of the homes have more than two. Given the proposed addition of up to 150 new housing units, we are not only alarmed by the significant amount of additional traffic, we are also very concerned that there will be insufficient onsite parking to accommodate the cars for residents and visitors. Given the proximity to our neighborhood, this could result in overflow parking on our streets. Any overflow parking not accommodated on site would require crossing New Hampshire Avenue or Route 108 and would not be safe.

Because of these issues, we strongly support the implementation advisory committee because it would provide an opportunity to monitor and ensure implementation of all the provisions within the Plan. Nearly all of the provisions that we support require coordination and funding from entities outside the Planning Department and would benefit from community input and engagement. We believe it would be a much needed communication and oversight tool, bringing together the community, developers, and Planning staff. The advisory committee could provide focus and community support for the necessary funding and coordination needed from the various entities within the County and State. Similar advisory committees have been set up elsewhere in the County, including for the Olney Town Center and Bethesda downtown.

While development on the southeast corner is the focal point of development and community concern, the focus of the advisory committee would be broader than just that. There are rumors that the owner of the Ashton Village Shopping Center may redevelop the shopping center once it is clearer what will happen to the southeast corner. There are also rumors that there is interest in redeveloping the remainder of the properties on Porter Road. It would be helpful to have a group with specific responsibility for advising on the implementation of the Plan as it pertains to all the properties covered by the Plan

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There are other aspects of the Plan where having an advisory committee focused on its implementation would be very helpful. The provisions for intersection improvements, crosswalks, sidewalks and side paths, green space and recreation, and trails rely on entities not under the purview of the Planning Department. An advisory committee could coordinate and provide community input with the County, State, and other entities involved in implementing these provisions.

As the Ashton Village Center Sector Plan is finalized, we ask that consideration be given to the real impact of future development. A famous line from testimony given at the public hearing on the 1998 Sandy Spring Ashton Master Plan still rings true today. A resident of of the Avenshire subdivision stated, "Ashton isn't close to anything, and we like it that way!" That is the essence of rural, along with being small.

Thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony on the Plan. We appreciate the efforts of staff, especially Jamey Pratt and Roberto Duke, in their efforts to engage the community. As the Plan is finalized, we hope that you will address the concerns that we have raised along with others in the community.