

MARYLAND-NATIONAL CAPITAL PARK AND
PLANNING COMMISSION

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MONTGOMERY COUNTY PLANNING BOARD

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ASHTON VILLAGE CENTER SECTOR PLAN
PUBLIC HEARING

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THURSDAY
SEPTEMBER 17, 2020

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The Montgomery County Planning Board
met via Video Teleconference, at 6:45 p.m. EDT,
Casey Anderson, Chair, presiding.

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT:

CASEY ANDERSON, Chair

NATALI FANI-GONZALEZ, Vice Chair

GERALD R. CICHY

TINA PATTERSON

PARTAP VERMA

STAFF PRESENT:

JAMEY PRATT, Senior Planner
ROBERTO DUKE, Planner Coordinator
CARRIE SANDERS, Interim Chief
BENJAMIN BERBERT, Acting Supervisor
KATHERINE NELSON, Planning Coordinator
RACHEL NEWHOUSE, Planning Coordinator
KACY ROHN, Historic Preservation Senior Planner
CHRIS VAN ALSTYNE, Transportation Planner
 Coordnator
DARREN FLUSCHE, Trails Master Planner
SHANNON OLSON, ITI

ALSO PRESENT:

FRANCOISE CARRIER, Bregman, Berbert, Schwartz &
 Gilday, LLC
DOUGLAS FARQUHAR, Sandy Spring Ashton Rural
 Preservation Consortium
CHARLES GLENDINNING

PAULA GLENDINNING

AMY MEDD

NADINE MORT, Sandy Spring Ashton Rural
 Preservation Consortium

RANDY NITTOLI, Ashton Village Home Owners
 Association

JEFF SCHWARTZ

DAN SNYDER

KATHLEEN WHEELER, Spring Lawn Farm HOA

1 P-R-O-C-E-E-D-I-N-G-S

2 6:44 p.m.

3 CHAIR ANDERSON: We're back for the
4 Ashton Village Center Sector Plan public hearing.
5 I want to make sure we've got the Board here. It
6 looks like I see Gerry and Natali. Is Tina
7 there?

8 COMMISSIONER PATTERSON: I'm here.

9 CHAIR ANDERSON: Very good. And
10 Natali, could you just make sure that we can hear
11 you.

12 VICE CHAIR FANI-GONZALEZ: I'm here,
13 Casey.

14 CHAIR ANDERSON: Thank you. I've got
15 Partap here so that means we've got five Board
16 members. Are Jamey Pratt and Roberto Duke with
17 us?

18 MR. PRATT: I managed to make it back.

19 MR. DUKE: I'm here also.

20 CHAIR ANDERSON: And we have a court
21 reporter.

22 COURT REPORTER: I am here.

1 CHAIR ANDERSON: Very good. All
2 right. I'm just going to go down the list and
3 you can testify as I call your name. If there is
4 anybody who's not logged in who makes it into the
5 meeting later, we'll come back to them. But I'm
6 going to take these folks in the order in which
7 they've signed up on Teams, and we've got a
8 couple on the phone at the end. I think there
9 are about 10 people who signed up to testify.

10 Let's start with --

11 MR. PRATT: Can I stop for one second?

12 CHAIR ANDERSON: Yes.

13 MR. PRATT: I'm told that there's a
14 statement I need to read at the beginning.

15 CHAIR ANDERSON: Oh, okay. Do you
16 want to take care of that now?

17 MR. PRATT: Yes, it's very brief. So
18 I just would like to enter the following items
19 into the record at this public hearing:

20 A copy of the notice of this public
21 hearing certifying that it was published in the
22 Washington Times newspaper on August 14, 2020; a

1 copy of the public hearing draft of the Ashton
2 Village Center Sector Plan dated July 2020 and
3 available on July 31st; a copy of the approved
4 and adopted Sandy Spring/Ashton Master Plan dated
5 July 1998.

6 And so those are the items to be
7 entered in the record. The public hearing draft
8 of this Sector Plan has been transmitted to the
9 Executive and the County Council, and we have
10 notified 17 local and county-wide, civic or
11 homeowners associations of this Sector Plan and
12 of this public hearing.

13 We were tentatively scheduled to be
14 back before you on October 8th for a work session
15 on this Sector Plan. We wanted to have the staff
16 report available before that date, so we
17 recommend that you leave the record of this
18 hearing open for one week until September 24th.
19 Thank you.

20 CHAIR ANDERSON: Okay. If there's no
21 objection, we'll leave the record open for a
22 week. And that means for the benefit of anybody

1 who's listening or anybody you know who might not
2 be listening now who would be interested in
3 commenting, they can get their comments into the
4 record over the next week, which means sending us
5 an email to Mr. Pratt or to me at M-NCPPC Chair
6 at the address on our website.

7 Those are both good ways of reaching
8 us and you can submit written materials for
9 anything you think of later or didn't have time
10 to tell us tonight. Again, as I say, if anybody
11 you know didn't have an opportunity to
12 participate and wants to weigh in formally.

13 So with that, let's hear from Randy
14 Nittoli. Mr. Nittoli?

15 MR. NITTOLI: Yes, I am here.

16 CHAIR ANDERSON: Okay, we hear you.
17 You can go ahead whenever you're ready.

18 MR. NITTOLI: I'm trying to get my
19 slide show started here. There we go. Can
20 everybody see the slides okay?

21 VICE CHAIR FANI-GONZALEZ: Yes.

22 CHAIR ANDERSON: We see them.

1 MR. NITTOLI: Members of the Planning
2 Board, my name is Randy Nittoli and I am the
3 Board President for the Ashton Village Homeowners
4 Association. I'd like to take this opportunity
5 to thank each of you for the opportunity to
6 testify before you today regarding the Ashton
7 Village Sector Plan.

8 Our Association is made up of 59
9 townhomes located on the corner of New Hampshire
10 Avenue MD650 and Olney Sandy Spring Road MD108.
11 Our community is very diverse in nature and our
12 residents have a wide range of family
13 demographics.

14 Ashton Village HOA is also one of the
15 oldest associations within Ashton and many
16 residents in our community are original owners.

17 Being within the center of the Ashton
18 area, none in our community were surprised to be
19 referenced in the Sector Plan. Our HOA is in
20 fact mentioned twice, once on page 36 and then
21 once of page 56. It is these two pages that I
22 would like to discuss with you today.

1 Members of our Board and our
2 Association have participated in all the
3 community meetings throughout the planning
4 process. Since many of us have lived in Ashton
5 Village for many years, we recognize that the
6 area is changing and that several updates are
7 needed.

8 When the draft of the plan was
9 published in July, my initial review of the plan
10 was met with confusion since the two specific
11 areas our HOA has referenced were never discussed
12 at any planning meetings.

13 In addition, the language of the plan
14 is aggressive in nature and has caused alarm
15 among some of our Association residents. The
16 Plan has left many in my community under the
17 impression the County is ready to annex our land
18 for public use.

19 I'd like to direct the Board to page
20 36 of the draft plan which discusses our common
21 use areas that surrounds the current stormwater
22 management pond.

1 The plan states that "options should
2 be explored to make this space more accessible to
3 the public" and refers to our declaration of
4 covenants for the Association's ability to
5 dedicate or transfer this land to the county.

6 The Ashton Village HOA is firmly
7 against any transfer of this land for public use
8 or for establishment of any public park. This
9 area is currently enjoyed by our Association
10 residents for recreational and private use, and
11 the Association currently maintains this area for
12 that purpose.

13 All residents of the Association have
14 signed a petition opposing this as well as many
15 local businesses that are also opposed. I've
16 included these petitions in the documents that
17 were attached that I sent to the Board prior to
18 this meeting.

19 The second portion I would like to
20 direct you to is on page 56 of the plan. This
21 section refers to our community playground that
22 is located in the center of our Association.

1 The plan goes on to state that this
2 playground should "ideally be incorporated into
3 this gathering space" again referencing the
4 public use space that I mentioned before.

5 The Ashton Village HOA firmly objects
6 to annexing our private playground for use as a
7 public space in any form. This playground was
8 paid for by our residents and is maintained
9 yearly through our private association dues.

10 This playground is frequently used as
11 a selling point for new families when they look
12 for houses within our area. And the private use
13 of this playground is reserved for the members of
14 our Associations and their guests.

15 The HOA has two major concerns
16 regarding the current plans and how it affects
17 our Association, these two being parking and foot
18 traffic into the area. I'd like to direct the
19 Board to the current slide which shows a copy of
20 our current property plat.

21 Currently, the HOA roads are
22 maintained by the County in the yellow portion,

1 and the HOA privately in the green portions.
2 Over the last five years that I've been Board
3 President, our community has struggled constantly
4 with parking.

5 The circles on the county-owned
6 portion in yellow are frequently filled and
7 overflowing and visitors to our Association have
8 on multiple occasions had no place to park. In
9 addition, the only way to access our Association
10 on foot is through the Ashton Village shopping
11 center located in the bottom right portion of the
12 map.

13 Visitors to our Association for use of
14 this "common area" would flood our Association
15 with additional traffic, both vehicular and foot,
16 and likely create significant parking problems.

17 I say this and bring up this point
18 because it is already something that we struggle
19 with daily, and adding additional traffic to this
20 crowded area will not eliminate any of these
21 problems.

22 There is no doubt that this additional

1 foot traffic and parking would take away from the
2 rural feel of Ashton and the rural feel of our
3 Association.

4 While the Association does have
5 objections to these specific portions of the
6 draft plan, we also recognize the fact that
7 Ashton is a very up and coming neighborhood and
8 that changes to keep the area vibrant are
9 necessary.

10 As such, I have prepared
11 recommendations for updating the language that is
12 currently in the draft plan. This language has
13 been reviewed by our Association and we feel the
14 language to be less hostile in nature and
15 hopefully reflect more accurately the intentions
16 of the plan.

17 In addition, the two areas of the plan
18 refer to our common space in two different sizes,
19 mainly two acres and three acres. So the
20 language has been updated to reflect the true
21 size of this common area which is in fact 3.2
22 acres. I have sent those comments to the Board

1 along with the documents that I sent prior to my
2 testimony.

3 That being said, the language of the
4 plan currently as it's written does not convey
5 positive intentions. Instead, it implies a
6 takeover by the County of our Association
7 commonplace.

8 It is clear from the draft plan that
9 the Planning Board values Ashton, its residents,
10 and the surrounding areas, and the Ashton Village
11 HOA is grateful to everyone on the Planning Board
12 for their efforts. We hope that future community
13 meetings will continue to involve our Association
14 and its residents, and we look forward to
15 continuing to be a voice for Ashton.

16 Again, I would like to take the
17 opportunity to thank the Planning Board for
18 allowing me to testify before you, and if you
19 have any questions for me I would be happy to
20 answer them at this time.

21 CHAIR ANDERSON: Thank you very much.
22 Douglas Farquhar, are you there?

1 MR. FARQUHAR: I am here, thank you
2 very much Chairman Anderson, and let me get my
3 screen up here.

4 CHAIR ANDERSON: Yes, take your time.

5 MR. FARQUHAR: Thank you.

6 CHAIR ANDERSON: Okay, we can see your
7 -- I think we can see your PowerPoint now.

8 MR. FARQUHAR: Great, thank you very
9 much, I appreciate it. My name is name is Doug
10 Farquhar, I'm a resident of Sandy Spring and I'm
11 speaking on behalf of the Sandy Spring/Ashton
12 Rural Preservation Consortium tonight.

13 The SSARPC is a group of community
14 residents who have been focused on keeping the
15 Ashton/Sandy Spring area from being over-
16 developed. Our credo is that we believe in
17 development that's in accordance with the Master
18 Plan, meaning the 1998 Sandy Spring/Ashton Master
19 Plan that Jamey Pratt referred to during the
20 virtual tour.

21 And in 2005 or '06, I forget which
22 year, our group was successful in convincing the

1 Planning Board to reject a proposal to put a big
2 box store on the southeast quadrant of the
3 intersection at Ashton. So, we continue to look
4 at projects. We are not against development. We
5 are against over-development.

6 So, we support several of the major
7 theses of the principles/objectives of the staff
8 plan. We support the Implementation Advisory
9 Committee that would advise on whether proposed
10 development is consistent with design guidelines.

11 We are very much in support of the
12 overlay zone having specific design requirements.
13 One of the things that we disagree with the draft
14 plan on is that we believe there should be less
15 dense zoning at the edges of the southeast
16 quadrant, and that will be one of the major
17 focuses of my testimony today.

18 The photographs that you see on the
19 left and the bottom center are photographs of
20 existing developments in Sandy Spring/Ashton,
21 actually these are both in Ashton, that we
22 believe do comport with having a rural character.

1 And we show also some residential over commercial
2 buildings in other towns and villages that we
3 believe would be successful in maintaining the
4 rural character but improving the Ashton Village
5 Center.

6 So, the language in the public hearing
7 draft of the plan is good. In multiple places it
8 talks about the cultural and historic resources
9 of the area. It talks about maintaining a rural
10 village, but the draft language doesn't have the
11 teeth that are necessary in order to maintain the
12 rural character of our area.

13 And to the members of the Planning
14 Board I would suggest that you will be leaving a
15 legacy for our neighborhood based on how you deal
16 with the proposal of the plan.

17 The legacy of maintaining, especially
18 on the southeast quadrant which is currently a
19 wide-open space of about nine or 10 acres, has
20 only one commercial establishment and one home on
21 it, and is a beautiful gateway to the Sandy
22 Spring/Ashton area as was presented and predicted

1 by the 1998 plan.

2 We are very nervous that that legacy
3 is going to be violated because the plan seems to
4 ignore the concerns that were expressed by nearly
5 100 people at the design workshops. And the plan
6 seems to be drafted so that it will allow this
7 kind of a development, which is not a rural
8 development at all.

9 This massive block of townhouses is
10 what was put up on the website of Dan Ryan
11 Builders as what will be going into the Ashton
12 Market Development that Jamey Pratt talked about
13 earlier. And this is what we fear, especially
14 with the high FAR that would be allowed on the
15 entire southeast quadrant of the intersection.

16 So, if we look at this earlier
17 picture, it shows the plan of what it looks like
18 we're going to get. This is what in the
19 townhouse overlay zone site plan, this is what we
20 saw. It's quite different as you can see.

21 Even this we don't consider to be
22 particularly rural, but at least it has

1 architectural elements, it has gaps in between
2 the buildings, it has real porches instead of
3 just rain coverage over an at-grade door. But
4 this again is quite a contrast from what looks
5 like is actually being proposed to be built there
6 from what was supposed to be built as the
7 community was shown.

8 So the future of Ashton is at stake.
9 We think all of the guidances and the objectives
10 that are expressed in the public hearing draft
11 are appropriate, but they're not mandatory. And
12 we've been through a couple of experiences
13 including the Ashton Market that show us we can't
14 rely on pretty pictures and guidances. We really
15 need to have very, very firm requirements.

16 The other instance is mentioned in the
17 second paragraph here. The Thomas Village
18 Townhouse Development which is erected next to
19 the Sandy Spring Bank building. We also saw very
20 nice pictures that showed big green spaces and
21 minimally-sized homes, and now what we've got
22 you'll see a picture of that later.

1 So, we need clear design requirements
2 in the zoning, and we also need to have reduced
3 density from what the staff is proposing. So, we
4 propose that language be added to the revised
5 overlay zone so that the design elements are
6 required, not optional, and that an advisory
7 committee be implemented.

8 So, we think design language should be
9 inserted into an overlay zone for the Ashton
10 Village sector. It would specifically require
11 that there would be mixed-use buildings with
12 residential over commercial, that there would be
13 architectural elements such as real porches,
14 varying setbacks, stoops, front gardens,
15 sidewalks, and a village green.

16 There should also be rural village
17 elements which would include brickwork, arched
18 windows, dormers, and significant variations in
19 building height. And again, we have been
20 promised in the past that there would be
21 significant variations in building height, but
22 what we've seen is the erection of townhouses

1 that have no variation in building height, or
2 variation in building height only because of the
3 grade but all of them being four-story buildings.

4 If we can get an Implementation
5 Advisory Committee, it would include community
6 members and those who have development expertise.
7 It would serve as an interface between
8 developers, the county and the community. It
9 would ensure that we stay abreast of final
10 development plans and changes, and would include
11 representatives of all of the stakeholder groups.

12 So, this is what we don't want. This
13 is the Thomas Village that was built right next
14 to the Sandy Spring Bank building. Again, you
15 see monolithic building masses completely vehicle
16 centric. Even when viewed from the major
17 thoroughfares, they tower over adjacent
18 neighborhoods, even though they were supposed to
19 be compatible with the adjacent neighborhood.
20 And there's only small strips of grass with tree
21 boxes but an expanse of asphalt; very limited
22 green spaces.

1 We think one of the key things in
2 terms of design elements, there should be no
3 apartment buildings. The 1998 Master Plan said
4 that on the southeast sector, there would be no
5 townhouses.

6 Well, that's gone. We understand we
7 can't fight for no townhouses any longer. But in
8 order to preserve the rural nature of the
9 entrance, the eastern entrance to the Sandy
10 Spring/Ashton area, we believe that apartment
11 buildings would be completely incompatible with a
12 rural feel for the Ashton community.

13 I note that there are no apartment
14 buildings within miles of Ashton except in Olney,
15 which is hardly a rural area anymore. And
16 community and the planners have been united in
17 trying to ensure that Ashton doesn't become
18 Olney.

19 Ashton is a town. We have a very rich
20 agricultural history with several horse farms, at
21 least two active livestock farms, and many
22 preserved meadows and agricultural fields in the

1 area.

2 Now, we don't oppose accessory
3 apartments, apartments in stacked flats,
4 apartments above commercial spaces. It's not
5 apartments that we oppose. It's the massive
6 apartment building structures that could be built
7 under the proposed plan if there are not
8 appropriate design elements, and these kind of
9 apartment buildings would never have been located
10 in rural towns.

11 The other thing that we feel very
12 strongly about is design. The southeast quadrant
13 includes nine or 10 acres. And the planners
14 continuously say that there would be only a
15 modest increase in residential development. That
16 is absolutely not true.

17 The zoning that the planners always
18 talk about is for four parcels or six parcels
19 that only constitute half of the area of that
20 southeast quadrant which currently has a
21 commercial FAR of .75 and residential FAR of .25.

22 But the remainder of the property, the

1 other 4.5 acres include, and Jamey Pratt referred
2 to this earlier, that the zoning that was
3 approved had six single-family homes on the
4 outskirts of this quadrant. So that as you
5 approach from either the north -- I'm sorry, if
6 you approach either from the south or from the
7 east, there would be a transition from the wide-
8 open spaces and the farms that you have passed
9 through into single-family homes with yards, and
10 then the commercial center would be concentrated
11 at the intersection.

12 So, we are okay for the 4.5 acres of
13 the southeast quadrant which are currently zoned
14 CRT to move to a FAR of .5 for both residential
15 and commercial. But the remaining parcels which
16 are located at the eastern and southern edges of
17 the southeast quadrant corner, and which
18 constitute about half of the property now, 4.5
19 acres, currently zoned R-60 and rural cluster, we
20 would like to see a CRN with a FAR of .25, which
21 would effectively limit residential square-
22 footage in those parcels to about 50,000 square

1 feet, which is still plenty of homes and plenty
2 of units in apartment buildings, in stacked
3 apartments or townhouses. It's still plenty of
4 residential space but would preserve the feel and
5 the area and the wide-open spaces and provide a
6 transition.

7 One of the things that we hear
8 constantly is that it's a principle of planning
9 that for a given parcel you don't have different
10 FARs. But here, where these are not the same
11 parcel, they are different parcels, they have
12 historically been treated as different parcels,
13 we think it makes sense to have a FAR of .5 for
14 the concentrated commercial and residential area
15 right at the intersection, and then a transition
16 area of .25.

17 There's no way to set, as I understand
18 it, a FAR anywhere between .25 and .5. That's
19 what the zoning ordinance allows. But by zoning
20 a part of the parcel, the part that's the
21 transition part at .25, but the center at .5, you
22 can achieve requirements that would make sure

1 that the transition is effectuated.

2 We would like to see single-family
3 homes at the edges with porches facing the
4 streets. This is the Wyndcrest Subdivision
5 that's nearby and the other elements that are set
6 forth there.

7 We believe as you get closer to the
8 intersection the design requirements could permit
9 stacked flats with key elements like looking like
10 duplexes, ample porches, small front yards, broad
11 stairways leading to side-by-side doorways to
12 each apartment which almost could be mistaken as
13 a double door to a traditional attached single-
14 family home.

15 And in terms of the townhouses
16 themselves as opposed to the monolithic block
17 that we saw that's being prepared by Dan Ryan for
18 Ashton Market, you would have small front yards,
19 you would have varying and limited heights in a
20 variety of architecture, staggered facades and a
21 variety of colors.

22 The commercial spaces near the

1 crossroads we would wholeheartedly endorse
2 residential over commercial space with the kinds
3 of design elements that are listed here and that
4 would match what looks like a rural hometown
5 village.

6 To ensure therefore that we preserve
7 the unique character of Ashton, it's important
8 that the Planning Board implement the Advisory
9 Committee, ensure less dense zoning at the edges
10 of the southeast quadrant, and implement an
11 overlay zone with specific design requirements.

12 Thank you very much. I appreciate
13 your consideration of these points.

14 CHAIR ANDERSON: Thank you. Francoise
15 Carrier is next.

16 MS. CARRIER: Thank you very much. I
17 think Doug still has his screen up. Lovely,
18 lovely little children, Doug.

19 CHAIR ANDERSON: Do you have any
20 competing pictures of your children or other
21 relatives --

22 MS. CARRIER: No, I have --

1 (Laughter.)

2 CHAIR ANDERSON: -- that you'd like to
3 present that you'd like to introduce into the
4 record?

5 (Laughter.)

6 MS. CARRIER: I have no pictures of my
7 children ready for you I'm afraid, and they're
8 not as cute as those because they're not babies
9 anymore.

10 So, I was going to try and just speak
11 to you for the first couple of minutes, but my
12 picture doesn't seem to pop up, so I will at
13 least give you something --

14 CHAIR ANDERSON: We see you.

15 MS. CARRIER: Oh, okay, because I
16 don't see my picture. Okay. So, good evening.
17 For the record my name is Francoise Carrier and
18 I'm testifying today on behalf of Nichols
19 Development Company.

20 Nichols is the master developer of the
21 site that Mr. Farquhar was just describing to
22 you, the largest future development site in the

1 Sector Plan area. It's a nine-acre tract of land
2 at the main intersection.

3 This site will be instrumental in
4 achieving the Sector Plan vision of a viable and
5 vibrant rural village that will protect and
6 enhance the character of the greater Ashton
7 community, and that line was from the draft plan.

8 I'd like to focus on two key words in
9 that vision, vibrant and viable, whose qualities
10 really go hand in hand and one can't be attained
11 without the other. The Village Center can only
12 be vibrant if the Sector Plan provides the
13 flexibility to support development that will be
14 economically viable.

15 At the same time, development will not
16 be economically viable unless it creates a place
17 that is vibrant, attracting new residents,
18 businesses and visitors.

19 The Sector Plan describes at some
20 length the history of master planning in the
21 Ashton area. It confirms five elements of rural
22 character that were identified in the previous

1 area master plan including rural open space,
2 neighborhoods and roads, but it makes the
3 important distinction that only one of these
4 elements of rural character is relevant within
5 the boundaries of this Sector Plan, the rural
6 villages element.

7 The other elements of rural character
8 apply to the larger area surrounding the Sandy
9 Spring and Ashton Village centers. This is a
10 crucial distinction because it acknowledges that
11 to serve the function of a village center, the
12 land covered by the Sector Plan needs to be
13 regulated differently than the surrounding area.

14 It needs to be regulated not to
15 continue the densities and building types in the
16 larger surrounding area, but to promote the kind
17 of development that will help the Village Center
18 thrive. Past master plans have not succeeded in
19 creating conditions that led to the desired
20 development.

21 Nichols is hopeful that this Sector
22 Plan will do that, but there will need to be some

1 adjustments to the working draft for that to
2 happen.

3 At a basic level, the combination of
4 height limits and design guidelines in the
5 working draft are just not consistent with the
6 vision of a vibrant and viable village center.

7 Nichols is in the process of preparing
8 detailed written suggestions of specific changes
9 that we'd like to see to the plan, and I'd like
10 to highlight a few of those for you. Did I
11 manage to show you my screen or just to close the
12 whole thing?

13 CHAIR ANDERSON: We see the screen.
14 We see your --

15 MS. CARRIER: Oh you do.

16 CHAIR ANDERSON: -- Ashton Village
17 Center sector plan and the blue background.

18 MS. CARRIER: Excellent. Okay. All
19 right. So, the first thing I would like to talk
20 about is the Implementation Advisory Committee.
21 Nichols really feels it would be
22 counterproductive to have a committee like that

1 in this community.

2 This is a small community with one
3 main developer. A committee like that is very
4 useful in a place where there are lots of
5 different property owners and development will be
6 implemented over time, one parcel at a time, and
7 it might be hard for community members to keep
8 track of it and stay engaged.

9 That's not the case here. We have one
10 main developer, one big piece of property. The
11 normal development process really provides ample
12 opportunity for community input particularly
13 because the overlay zone here is recommended to
14 require site plan approval even in the CRN zone
15 which typically wouldn't have it.

16 The main outcome of an Implementation
17 Committee here would really be to increase the
18 delays and procedural hurdles that Nichols faces,
19 and that just increases the costs of development.

20 The hope for a viable village center
21 in Ashton where it's already difficult to develop
22 profitably, really just can't afford extra layers

1 of costs. So Nichols urges the planning board to
2 remove the recommendation for an advisory
3 committee.

4 The density that's proposed on the
5 nine-acre site, the site currently has three
6 zones which I think you've already heard. About
7 half of it is CRT, the rest is residential.
8 Nichols would have preferred to keep the CRT
9 zoning for the portion that currently has it, but
10 is prepared to accept the CRN zone for the entire
11 site.

12 Nichols does request slightly more
13 height and density than the working draft
14 recommends. We propose an overall density cap of
15 .75 FAR leaving both the commercial and the
16 residential components of that density at .5.

17 And the reason that we'd like to see
18 a little more than .5 as the total density is
19 mostly to allow room for possible growth in the
20 commercial element of the project if future
21 market conditions support it. Right now, there
22 is not a strong market for a large commercial

1 component, but Nichols would love to see that
2 grow over time and have a little bit of room in
3 the FAR cap to do that.

4 Nichols also would propose a slightly
5 higher height limit than what the staff has
6 recommended, 45 feet rather than 40, with
7 language that would limit that 45 feet just to a
8 modest number of mixed-use buildings that would
9 be near the intersection.

10 This is really to allow Nichols to
11 have buildings that would have a large, a high
12 ceiling on the ground floor or podium, and then
13 some residential above. It's hard to fit that
14 within a 40-foot height limit. So having the
15 capacity to do that, 45 feet on certain
16 buildings, would really make a big difference in
17 the final product.

18 The design guidelines are currently
19 suggested as to be part of the Master Plan and
20 Nichols would strongly suggest that it should be
21 a separate document that is approved by the
22 Planning Board rather than the County Council.

1 If it's a Planning Board document,
2 that avoids elevating these very specific design
3 provisions from guidelines to Master Plan
4 recommendations. Guidelines can have a little
5 bit of flexibility in their interpretation.

6 Master Plan recommendations require a
7 finding of substantial conformance for every
8 project, and they also can't be changed until the
9 next Sector Plan amendment. So that's our
10 recommendation regarding where those should be in
11 the process.

12 There's one recommendation regarding
13 building types that Nichols finds quite
14 restrictive. It's a recommendation that on the
15 main roads all residential buildings should
16 suggest a single-family detached house or duplex.

17 A great deal of the site is along
18 those two road frontages so that's a very
19 significant restriction. It would really
20 undercut the ability to build a community with a
21 variety of building types and roof lines and
22 architectural details, and it would lead to

1 buildings ending up having their side facades
2 facing the main roads rather than their more
3 activating front facades, so we would request
4 elimination of that provision.

5 There are also some very specific
6 recommendations in the design guidelines section
7 for the lengths of buildings, and Nichols
8 requests a slight increase for all of these. A
9 slight increase for the maximum length of
10 residential buildings along the main road to
11 allow for more variety in building types, and a
12 slight increase for mixed-use buildings along the
13 main road, 120 feet rather than 80, which would
14 really allow Nichols to have mixed-use buildings
15 that have an appropriate presence on these main
16 thoroughfares. An 80-foot limit is really very
17 restrictive for a mixed-use building.

18 And for buildings that are on the
19 interior of this site, we would recommend a limit
20 of 150 feet rather than 120. That really is to
21 allow flexibility in the future. We don't know
22 what kind of commercial uses might be attracted

1 to this site in the future, and limiting the
2 buildings to 120 feet in length also limits the
3 size of the spaces that can be rented to
4 different tenants and can really be quite
5 constraining.

6 Nichols would also propose that the
7 plan authorize the Planning Board to approve
8 buildings that exceed these limits if the Board
9 finds that an alternative design would better
10 serve the Master Plan objectives and the public
11 interest.

12 Nichols' goal here is to create a
13 community that looks like it grew up organically,
14 but to do that they need some flexibility, more
15 flexibility than this draft provides. Nichols
16 considers it unlikely that a project could be
17 built on this site consistent with all of the
18 height and design recommendations in this draft
19 plan that would even reach the staff's
20 recommended density of 0.5 FAR, let alone create
21 a viable development with a vibrant streetscape.

22 In fact, the design guidelines contain

1 a number of images of buildings in vibrant,
2 pedestrian-friendly settings like these, and some
3 of these look like they wouldn't pass muster with
4 all of the requirements in the draft plan.

5 So here are a few pictures of the
6 kinds of buildings that Nichols would like to
7 include in this project. We think that some of
8 these would not work with this working draft.
9 And with the restrictions of the height limits in
10 the guideline, the struggle to reach a viable
11 level of density would make it impossible to also
12 use a variety in the roof lines and the building
13 types and the architectural features that will
14 give this project vibrancy.

15 So that concludes my remarks about the
16 main large property we've been talking about.
17 There's one other property I'd like to mention
18 that Nichols owns which is a few miles -- a few
19 miles -- a few hundred feet from the main
20 intersection, and that is the Ashton Market
21 property which Mr. Farquhar also mentioned.

22 Nichols is currently building a mixed-

1 use building on that property, on a piece of that
2 property, which is in the Village Core part of
3 the Master Plan. And that property is currently
4 zoned at .75 FAR, the work in the CRT zone. And
5 the working draft recommends downgrading the zone
6 and also downzoning the FAR.

7 Nichols is willing to accept the
8 change from CRT to CRN as appropriate in the
9 Ashton context, but really sees no justification
10 for reducing the overall density. So we request
11 to retain the 0.75 FAR that's currently on that
12 property.

13 Thank you very much for your time and
14 we look forward to working with you on the plan.
15 Of course, I'm happy to answer questions if there
16 are any.

17 CHAIR ANDERSON: Okay, thank you very
18 much. Is Kathleen Wheeler there? It looks like
19 she must be because that looks like her
20 PowerPoint presentation. Ms. Wheeler, can you
21 hear us? I can't hear you if you're speaking. I
22 can see her presentation but I can't hear you.

1 Now I don't see her presentation either. Can you
2 just verify that you're not muted?

3 MS. WHEELER: Unmute.

4 CHAIR ANDERSON: Ah, there we go. Now
5 I can hear you.

6 MS. WHEELER: Okay. Can you hear me
7 now?

8 CHAIR ANDERSON: Yes, and now I can
9 see you. Do you want to put your PowerPoint back
10 up, is that what you wanted to do?

11 MS. WHEELER: Yes. They have my
12 PowerPoint there.

13 CHAIR ANDERSON: Oh, okay. We can
14 share your screen. Yes, okay, we're sharing the
15 PowerPoint from here.

16 MS. WHEELER: Okay, great.

17 CHAIR ANDERSON: We're seeing the
18 title page right now, so you just let them know
19 when you want to move it forward.

20 MS. WHEELER: Okay. You can go ahead
21 and start it. Okay, so my name is Kathleen
22 Wheeler for the record, and I'm testifying on

1 behalf of the Spring Lawn Farm Homeowners
2 Association. Okay, next slide.

3 So Spring Lawn Farm is on the west
4 side of New Hampshire Avenue just south of the
5 intersection of New Hampshire Avenue and Route
6 108. The boundary for the Ashton Village Sector
7 Plan is the broken black line on the map, and you
8 can see where we've highlighted where Spring Lawn
9 Farm is in relationship to that.

10 Our Homeowners Association is about 30
11 years old and consists of 47 single-family homes.
12 Residents range in age from less than a year to
13 over 90 years old. We have residents who are the
14 original owners of their homes as well as three
15 young families who moved in since the first of
16 the year.

17 Most of us came from other parts of
18 Montgomery County because Ashton is different
19 than other parts of the county. We love the
20 small-town feel that is hard to find in the
21 Washington area as well as nearby working farms
22 and historic Sandy Spring. Next slide.

1 Today, Ashton is at a crossroads both
2 literally and figuratively. The implementation
3 of the Ashton Village Sector Plan will determine
4 the future of our community. Will it preserve
5 Ashton's unique role and historic character, or
6 will Ashton just become one more suburban
7 community?

8 Will the intersection of Route 108 and
9 New Hampshire Avenue finally get improved or will
10 it just be further clogged and unsafe and as
11 result of intense development on its southeast
12 corner? While the plan before you has many good
13 things that we do support, there are also areas
14 of concern. Next slide.

15 First, the things that we do support.
16 We strongly support an Implementation Advisory
17 Committee. We support safe sidewalks and
18 sidepaths where they're missing. We support
19 crosswalks and pedestrian signals across all
20 parts of intersection of Route 108 and New
21 Hampshire Avenue at the Village Center.

22 We strongly support intersection

1 improvements without expanding the overall size
2 of the intersection including moving the million
3 dollar pole at the corner of New Hampshire Avenue
4 and Route 108.

5 We also support the provision for
6 expanding the hiking and biking network in the
7 area. And we also very strongly support the
8 provision of signage that connects the Village
9 Center to historic and cultural resources in the
10 greater Ashton community. Next slide.

11 Each of these provisions are critical
12 and long overdue. While the Spring Lawn Farm
13 neighborhood is within close proximity to the
14 bank, the Post Office, and various businesses in
15 Ashton, there's no sidewalk or sidepath or
16 crosswalks with signals that enable us to walk
17 there safely. Next slide.

18 The biggest concern that we have with
19 the plan is the development on the southeast
20 corner because of its proximity to our
21 neighborhood. The entrance to our neighborhood
22 is less than one-tenth of a mile from the

1 southern edge of this property.

2 Some of the homes in our Homeowners
3 Association back to a row of houses directly
4 across New Hampshire Avenue from the southeast
5 corner property. We will be directly impacted by
6 the traffic, noise, and light pollution generated
7 by this development.

8 Development on the southeast corner
9 has been an issue dating back to prior to the
10 adoption of the 1998 Sandy Spring/Ashton Master
11 Plan. The '98 plan included language that
12 specifically prohibited townhouses on the parcels
13 at that corner.

14 Subsequent to its adoption, plans for
15 the mixed-use Ashton Meeting Project were
16 approved in 2008 and included six single-family
17 homes and commercial space. With the zoning
18 changes recommended in the draft plan, the
19 potential number of units could be 20 times the
20 number approved and supported by the community in
21 2008.

22 Besides the number of units, the

1 proposed height limits exceed those of the
2 surrounding development on adjacent corners of
3 the intersection as well as the single-family
4 homes that border the property. This level of
5 development will overrun the already over-taxed
6 infrastructure of Ashton. Next slide.

7 Because of the pandemic, current
8 traffic levels have been reduced. At some point,
9 traffic levels will return to the levels
10 described here. Traffic backs up on Route 108
11 and New Hampshire Avenue during the morning and
12 evening rush hours. Cars back up past the
13 entrance to our neighborhood as far as you can
14 see and well beyond south on New Hampshire
15 Avenue.

16 While it can take less than 10 minutes
17 to go to or from Olney during non-rush hours, it
18 can take well over 20 minutes during the
19 afternoon rush hour when traffic can back up on
20 Route 108 almost into Olney which is three miles
21 away. The plan suggests that dependence on cars
22 for residents of the new development could be

1 mitigated by expansion of Ride-On or MetroBus
2 routes.

3 Earlier this year the Washington Area
4 Metropolitan Transit Authority proposed as part
5 of its 2021 budget the elimination of several bus
6 routes, including the single bus route that
7 serves Ashton only at rush hours during the week.
8 This proposal was not included in the final 2021
9 budget due to the rigorous efforts of the County
10 Council and State Delegation.

11 Given the current state of ridership
12 on Ride-On buses and county resources, expansion
13 of Ride-On bus service is highly unlikely in the
14 near future. As a result, new residents will be
15 primarily dependent on cars for transportation.

16 Next slide.

17 In the morning when school is in
18 session, it can take two to three light cycles to
19 turn left from New Hampshire Avenue to go west on
20 Route 108 towards Olney. Traffic also backs up
21 in all directions in the afternoon when Sherwood
22 High School dismisses students or on Friday

1 nights when the Sherwood football team is playing
2 at home. Next slide.

3 Most households in this area have at
4 least two cars. And in our neighborhood about
5 one-third of the houses have more than two,
6 especially those with teenagers or multi-
7 generational homes.

8 Given the possible addition of well
9 over 100 new housing units, we are not only
10 alarmed by the significant amount of additional
11 traffic, we are also very concerned that there
12 will be insufficient onsite parking to
13 accommodate the cars for residents and visitors.

14 Given the proximity to our
15 neighborhood, this could result in overflow
16 parking on our streets. Any overflow parking not
17 accommodated on site would require crossing New
18 Hampshire Avenue or Route 108 and would not be
19 safe. Next slide.

20 Because of these issues, we strongly
21 support the implementation of an Advisory
22 Committee because it would provide an opportunity

1 to monitor and ensure implementation of the
2 provisions within the plan. Nearly all of the
3 provisions that we support require coordination
4 and funding from entities outside the Planning
5 Department and would benefit from community input
6 and engagement.

7 We believe it would be a much-needed
8 communication and oversight tool bringing
9 together the community, developers, and planning
10 staff. Similar advisory committees have been set
11 up elsewhere in the county. Next slide.

12 While development on the southeast
13 corner is a focal point of development and
14 community concern, the focus of the advisory
15 committee would be broader than just that.

16 There are rumors that the owner of the
17 Ashton Village Shopping Center may redevelop the
18 shopping center once it's clear what will happen
19 on the southeast corner. There are also rumors
20 that there is interest in redeveloping the
21 remainder of the properties on Porter Road.

22 It would be helpful to have a group

1 with specific responsibility for advising on the
2 implementation of a plan as it pertains to all
3 the properties covered by the plan.

4 There are other aspects of the plan
5 where having an advisory committee focused on its
6 implementation would be very helpful. The
7 provisions for intersection improvements,
8 crosswalks, sidewalks and sidepaths, green space
9 and recreation and trails rely on entities not
10 under the purview of the Planning Department.

11 Also of concern is the provision of
12 the environmentally sensitive areas and other
13 resources within the plan area. An Advisory
14 Committee could help coordinate and provide
15 community input and support for the necessary
16 funding and actions needed from the various
17 entities within the county and state.

18 As the Ashton Village Center Sector
19 Plan is finalized, we ask that consideration be
20 given to the real impact of future development.

21 Thank you for this opportunity to
22 provide testimony on the Plan. We particularly

1 appreciate the efforts of staff, Jamey Pratt and
2 Roberto Duke in particular, in their efforts to
3 engage the community. Next slide please.

4 I love the great philosopher Earl in
5 the Pickles comic strip. Here, his wife says
6 proudly, "It's something new, part sweater and
7 part poncho. I call it a swancho." To which
8 Earl sagely replies, "Just because you can knit
9 something, doesn't mean you should." Or for
10 Ashton, just because you can build it, doesn't
11 mean you should.

12 Will Ashton look like a rural village,
13 or without enforceable design guidelines and
14 appropriate scale of development, will Ashton be
15 much more like a swancho?

16 Thank you. This concludes my
17 testimony.

18 CHAIR ANDERSON: Thank you. And is
19 Paula Glendinning here? Paula Glendinning is
20 next.

21 MS. GLENDINNING: I'm here.

22 CHAIR ANDERSON: Oh, very good. We

1 hear you.

2 MS. GLENDINNING: Okay. I've lived in
3 Ashton for almost 29 years, and over and over
4 during that time I've been grateful that the
5 people who built Sandy Spring and Ashton cared
6 about making this a strong community.

7 There have been so many meetings for
8 so many years to talk about the potential
9 development at this Ashton Village intersection
10 that you may be wondering why our community
11 doesn't just give up.

12 We are going to be living here with
13 the results of what you decide to let the
14 developers do. And the people and the history of
15 this community are linked together more than you
16 can see by driving through it.

17 I have a map that I hope I can show
18 you. When I click on the open share tray, I was
19 assured ahead of time that I would see an option
20 to share a map, but I don't see it. Is it being
21 shown?

22 CHAIR ANDERSON: I think you should see

1 a bar and there should be a box with an arrow in
2 it? Do you see the bar that has the red button
3 to leave?

4 MS. GLENDINNING: No, I've clicked on
5 the open the share tray, and when I click on open
6 the share tray, it doesn't do anything.

7 CHAIR ANDERSON: Do we have the
8 presentation here?

9 MS. GLENDINNING: No. I asked before
10 the meeting when we signed in if I could share a
11 photo, and they said I just click open the share
12 tray and there would be an option.

13 MS. OLSON: Hi Ms. Glendinning. This
14 is Shannon Olson.

15 MS. GLENDINNING: Hi Shannon.

16 MS. OLSON: So if you hit the share
17 tray, you should then have the option to share
18 your desktop.

19 MS. GLENDINNING: It doesn't do
20 anything when I open the share tray.

21 MS. OLSON: Okay, close it and try one
22 more time.

1 MS. GLENDINNING: Yes, I've done it
2 about five times.

3 MS. OLSON: Then would you like to
4 email me your image and we'll go on to the next
5 person and come back to you?

6 MS. GLENDINNING: Okay, sure.

7 CHAIR ANDERSON: Yes, go ahead and do
8 that. We'll come back, don't worry, we won't
9 miss you. We won't lose you.

10 MS. GLENDINNING: Okay.

11 CHAIR ANDERSON: Okay. Let's go ahead
12 with Amy Medd. Is Amy Medd there?

13 MS. MEDD: I am here.

14 CHAIR ANDERSON: Very good, and did
15 you have a presentation you wanted to show?

16 MS. MEDD: I do.

17 CHAIR ANDERSON: Okay, we see your
18 PowerPoint.

19 MS. MEDD: Fantastic, great. So for
20 the record, my name is Amy Medd. Thank you for
21 allowing me to speak today.

22 So, my testimony is really going to

1 focus on the need for an implementation advisory
2 committee so that we can really achieve the best
3 possible product from any development within
4 Ashton.

5 And I agree with Francoise earlier in
6 that it's important that a development be viable
7 and vibrant. And I think we'd all agree that
8 Olney is viable and vibrant. And downtown
9 Rockville is viable and vibrant.

10 But I don't think the community wants
11 to see a swath of those sorts of areas cut out
12 and dropped into this southeast quadrant. And
13 that's what I think an Implementation Advisory
14 Committee would help us avoid.

15 So I live in the Wyndcrest
16 neighborhood of Ashton which Jamey took us on a
17 tour of before. This is the adorable set of
18 single-family homes and townhouses. It's highly
19 sought after. These houses rarely go on the
20 market, and when they do they get snapped up very
21 quickly, so it's certainly a very viable sort of
22 building design.

1 And you only need to look at this
2 neighborhood to see design that's in keeping with
3 the vision of Ashton. So you can see we have
4 porches, we have dormers, picket fences, rear-
5 entry garages that back up to alleys, and most
6 importantly, a common green space for the
7 residents which I think is going to be extremely
8 important for that southeast quadrant to ensure
9 that there is some large green space that's
10 secured so that residents from all over in Ashton
11 can come and share in this space.

12 So unfortunately, I feel like we're
13 moving away from this style of building. And the
14 community feels extremely strongly that having
15 that rural village feel is important.

16 These are some outputs from the
17 community workshop in October of 2019, and you
18 can see that I've boxed out some of the items
19 that I feel are particularly important. So
20 having community design control, architectural
21 review, clear established criteria with a
22 development compatible with a rural village.

1 Some of the threats that we identified
2 were over-development, loss of open space, loss
3 of that rural village character. And so we found
4 in that workshop that keeping that rural concept
5 was extremely important to us.

6 In addition, if you look back at any
7 of these Sector plans or Master Plans, the word
8 rural comes up numerous times. So if you go back
9 to the 1998 plan, the word rural shows up 679
10 times. I didn't count, you can do a word search
11 so that's pretty helpful. In the 2015 plan, it
12 showed up 169 times. And in this current plan
13 that's being reviewed today, it showed up 135
14 times.

15 And I question the ability of any of
16 these plans to truly deliver on that vision.
17 Even though it's such a central topic to these
18 master plans, I am concerned that the plans just
19 appear to be guidances and recommendations.

20 Beyond zoning and FAR and building
21 codes, there really are no requirements for a
22 developer to actually follow any of these

1 recommendations. I worry that the words in these
2 documents are really just a salve or a pacifier
3 that lead the public to believe that we're going
4 to see development that's in keeping with a rural
5 village center.

6 And so I know we saw it before, but
7 we're going to see it again. This is some images
8 of the Ashton Market, and I think a lot of design
9 work it looks like went into that commercial
10 building. It has character, it feels activated,
11 it looks vibrant to me.

12 But if we look at the townhouses which
13 Doug Farquhar also showed previously, I don't
14 think that this really evokes the feeling of a
15 rural village center. Where are the porches?
16 Why is there just this sad overhang to protect
17 the owner from rain when they're entering into
18 their homes?

19 Where are the gardens? Where are the
20 architectural details that make this feel homey
21 and remind you that you're in a town with
22 significant history with the Underground

1 Railroad, with the Sandy Spring, et cetera.

2 And I suppose we could say that
3 there's varying roof lines here, there's dormers,
4 there's a couple bumpouts of rather modern-
5 looking bay windows. But I don't think it takes
6 an architectural degree to say that this does not
7 scream rural village.

8 And so herein lies the problem. There
9 are words that are used in documents and images
10 that get shown that basically pacify the
11 community in the moment, and they don't look or
12 sound so bad. And they dampen the public outcry
13 because people think that they're going to get
14 something in line with their own vision.

15 But time after time we find out that
16 the final product is very different. We find out
17 that inch by inch, development by development,
18 the reality moves farther away from the vision of
19 a rural village. And that vision goes back 22
20 years to that first Sector Plan.

21 And so this is why we need an
22 Implementation Advisory Committee to ensure that

1 what gets built in Ashton stays true to that
2 vision that's so important to our community.

3 Thank you for the opportunity to share
4 my thoughts. That concludes my testimony.

5 CHAIR ANDERSON: Thank you. And I'm
6 just going to ask our IT folks if Paula
7 Glendinning's presentation has arrived? And it
8 has, so I'm going to ask her to come back and
9 we'll have our staff put that up on the screen so
10 everybody can see it. Ms. Glendinning, are you
11 still there?

12 MS. GLENDINNING: I'm here, thanks
13 very much.

14 CHAIR ANDERSON: Okay.

15 MS. GLENDINNING: I'm sorry. I think
16 maybe Microsoft Teams doesn't like Mac hardware
17 too much.

18 CHAIR ANDERSON: Well, in any event,
19 we've got it now. We're looking at a map of
20 Ashton.

21 MS. GLENDINNING: Great. So this is
22 a map that my husband, Charlie, got from Sarah

1 Rogers from Heritage Montgomery, and the light
2 red-striped area is what's called the Montgomery
3 County Heritage Area.

4 You can see the pink or purple words
5 that say Montgomery County Heritage Area. And
6 you can see that the gateway to the Heritage Area
7 is Ashton Road which is Route 108 that comes into
8 Ashton. And the intersection of 108 and New
9 Hampshire is a crucial piece of that gateway.
10 And the parcel on the southeast corner is within
11 the hashtags of the Montgomery County Heritage
12 Area.

13 And there are hidden gems in Ashton
14 and Sandy Spring that you can't see from driving
15 through, but that are important in women's
16 history, in the progress of civil rights, and in
17 American history.

18 Just to the edge of my neighborhood is
19 a home called Cherry Grove which was a part of
20 the Underground Railroad as were many other homes
21 in our area in the 19th century.

22 And the home that is just across from

1 Sherwood High School that Jamey referred to
2 that's called Cloverly, the name of the home used
3 to be Sherwood.

4 That was the meeting place for
5 possibly the oldest women's association in the
6 U.S. that is still meeting. There are minutes of
7 the Mutual Improvement Association that are
8 available from 1857 to today. That same house
9 was used as a recuperation center for nurses
10 during the Civil War.

11 And there's another home in Sandy
12 Spring called Harewood which was the home of Dean
13 Acheson while he was contributing to the founding
14 of NATO. So in every century, this has been an
15 important community and it's worth our time to
16 take care for what it will be in the next
17 century.

18 Now 13 years ago many of us were
19 attending hearings about the same piece of land
20 in Ashton. You can take the map down now if
21 you'd rather.

22 So this same piece of property was the

1 subject of meetings 13 years ago because the
2 developer wanted to put more commercial buildings
3 and paved parking space on that piece of land
4 than the Master Plan would allow at the time.

5 After a long process, the community,
6 the Planning Board, and the developer, Mr.
7 Nichols, came to an agreement to allow six
8 single-family homes plus the one that's on the
9 parcel adjacent, plus a group of small to medium
10 shops that fit the village concept.

11 Then when the economic crash hit in
12 2008, the building plans plus the promised safety
13 improvements to the intersection were all put on
14 hold.

15 Now, 12 years later, we're still
16 waiting for any safety improvements. No
17 crosswalk at a very busy intersection near a high
18 school, and that shouldn't depend on any
19 development happening. We should've had
20 crosswalks long ago.

21 I realize that the State is the
22 primary part of that puzzle that needs to put in

1 the crosswalks, but I hope the County can help us
2 with this.

3 So now, after all these years and many
4 more meetings, the draft plan is now being
5 presented that will allow up to 150 homes on this
6 small piece of land. That, to me, is more than a
7 modest bump and it's not my idea of a rural
8 village on only about a nine-acre parcel that can
9 be built on. It's a huge increase from seven
10 homes.

11 But the developer wants to convince
12 you that even that is not enough homes and not
13 enough pavement. We need for the Planning Board
14 to put some strong design regulations in place
15 for Ashton.

16 When we started this current round of
17 meetings in 2019, the rooms were filled for every
18 meeting. For the first meeting at the Sandy
19 Spring Museum in May, and the work sessions in
20 October, and the meeting at the Sandy Spring fire
21 hall in January. And in-between that time, Fred
22 Boyd and Roberto Duke held office hours at the

1 Sandy Spring Museum and were available for the
2 community for questions.

3 And every time I went to any of these
4 meetings, there would be members of the community
5 asking how much development is going to be
6 allowed. And this year, since he came into the
7 position, Jamey Pratt has been available to speak
8 with our community about our questions many
9 times.

10 At all of these meetings the
11 overwhelming community request was to preserve
12 the rural character of Ashton and to keep the
13 density of building that the Master Plans have
14 always promised us.

15 In January when the draft plan was
16 shown, every single speaker in that full room
17 spoke against it. And the Planning Board staff
18 assured us they were listening.

19 The most important change I can see
20 that was made to the plan since then is the
21 addition of an advisory group, and I hope that
22 you make that happen.

1 The only other significant change I
2 could see was to remove the drawings that would
3 show us how many buildings could be allowed with
4 an FAR of 0.5 across the property. The FAR was
5 not changed, the drawings were just removed.

6 I understand that you're doing the
7 best you can to adapt to the public health
8 crisis, but these virtual hearings are a big
9 obstacle to many people in our community. And
10 it's always been clear for hundreds of years that
11 the communities of Ashton and Sandy Spring care
12 about their neighborhood.

13 The meetings that were full before are
14 a big difference from this meeting when only a
15 few people have signed up to speak partly because
16 tonight is back-to-school night at many of the
17 schools. Last year Roberto Duke was particularly
18 careful to find out when the back-to-school
19 nights were to avoid that for our meetings. And
20 this year the back-to-school nights were not in
21 person, but the parents still have that conflict.

22 So, I'm glad to see that you've opened

1 up the period of time when letters can still be
2 sent at least, because we need the protection
3 that you can give us. Because if you give away
4 Ashton's rural character, we'll lose something
5 that we can never get back. Thank you.

6 CHAIR ANDERSON: Thank you. Is
7 Charles Glendinning there? Charles Glendinning?

8 MR. GLENDINNING: I'm here.

9 CHAIR ANDERSON: Okay, very good. We
10 can hear you. Whenever you're ready, go right
11 ahead.

12 MR. GLENDINNING: There we go, all
13 right. I'm Charlie Glendinning and my wife and I
14 have lived in the Spring Lawn Farm development
15 for about 29 years just a few hundred feet from
16 the property in question.

17 My concern is the damage that 150 new
18 townhouses might do to one of the most historic
19 areas in all of Montgomery County. We have yet
20 to see any concrete plans, but it appears this
21 recent language could possibly allow just that.

22 Please know I'm not against

1 development. I just think the property needs to
2 be developed carefully, and I encourage the
3 formation of an Advisory Board to help shape it
4 into a true rural village.

5 In our area are many historic houses.
6 Most are on the National Register, but all are of
7 great interest to Heritage Montgomery. Many of
8 them were the homes of Quaker farmers who built
9 them in the 1700s and 1800s and we drive by them
10 every day.

11 Add to them the wonderful teaching
12 opportunities available at the Sandy Spring
13 Museum, Woodlawn, including the Underground
14 Railroad that runs through our neighborhood, and
15 the Slave Museum on Brooke Road, an important
16 exhibit curated by Winston Anderson.

17 Many families in our area, like the
18 Snowdens and the Farquhars, came to Sandy Spring
19 in the mid-1700s. Some of their descendants are
20 still living in the community. Added to them are
21 the descendants of slaves freed by the Quakers
22 long before emancipation. Some of their

1 descendants are still living here as well, and
2 the Quakers are still meeting in the meeting
3 house.

4 This is why I'm concerned that the
5 Board understand that the sense of history is
6 sometimes just a feeling. And because of that,
7 it can be a bit fragile. The look of a stand of
8 old-growth trees, an old house across a field, a
9 stone barn with a pasture of horses or sheep.
10 The term for this is viewshed and it should carry
11 a comparable weight for the Planning Board as the
12 term watershed.

13 Filling this property with rows of
14 tall townhouses would kill its viewshed, and
15 along with it much of the feeling of history in
16 our area. We have all seen what this looks like
17 and it is not rural.

18 I've recently been in contact with
19 Sarah Rogers, Executive Director of Heritage
20 Montgomery, who provided the map that Paula
21 showed you. She assured me that the Planning
22 Board is aware of the effects that changes in the

1 Master Plan will have on the missions of Heritage
2 Montgomery and the agricultural reserve. She is
3 very interested in the outcome of this meeting
4 and what the Planning Board finally decides to
5 do. I thank you for your time.

6 CHAIR ANDERSON: Thank you very much.
7 Is Nadine Mort there?

8 MS. MORT: Yes and yes.

9 CHAIR ANDERSON: We can hear you which
10 is great news. If you want to go ahead whenever
11 you are ready, that would be great.

12 MS. MORT: I have my camera -- okay,
13 I clicked on the camera, let's see, clicking
14 again.

15 CHAIR ANDERSON: We saw you until you
16 did something just now. Okay, you're back. We
17 see you.

18 MS. MORT: Okay, great. Good evening
19 all. My name is Nadine Mort and I've lived a
20 quarter mile from the Ashton Crossroads for the
21 past 40 years on a 100-acre tract of forest and
22 farmland. Four other families own parcels of

1 this property, and farmer Todd Greenstone raises
2 corn and wheat there.

3 Our land is beside Serendipity Farm
4 which Todd also cultivates. Directly across is
5 Blueberry Gardens, a pick-your-own organic farm
6 right next door to historic Tanglewood with 25
7 acres of rolling fields.

8 A bit further down the road is Tim
9 Connor's Sheep Farm. Perhaps you know Tom
10 Farquhar's beautiful organic farm located just
11 200 yards north of the Ashton Crossroads.
12 Several more sheep farms are also situated just
13 beyond our junction.

14 You get my point. Yes, Ashton is
15 rural and feels rural. When you drive up New
16 Hampshire Avenue into our village, the air seems
17 fresher, the trees bigger, and the green spaces
18 calm and welcoming.

19 After careful review of the Ashton
20 Village Center Sector Plan, I am pleased that it
21 contains design elements echoing the rural
22 characteristics of Ashton, many of which

1 community members contributed at our earlier
2 workshops, meetings and Zoom calls.

3 Clearly, the members of the design
4 team have worked hard and the proposed drawings
5 attempt to follow the guidelines in the Master
6 Plan that any development honors the rural and
7 historic character of the area.

8 This leads me to my primary concern,
9 that a citizen's advisory committee as
10 recommended by the Planning Board Staff, section
11 6.5 must be established as we move forward.

12 As you have heard, many residents feel
13 their concerns were not acknowledged and/or
14 ignored in the past. In addition, building
15 design images presented to the community and
16 Planning Board during the initial and preliminary
17 approval stages turn out to be very different
18 from the final results.

19 Specifically, the approved number of
20 stories, building heights, green space, and rural
21 design elements do not appear in the final
22 construction. This has led to oversized,

1 suburban-style townhouse development such as
2 Thomas Village, Ashton Market, and the enormous
3 Alloway Building.

4 It should be acknowledged that designs
5 initially submitted are often replaced with
6 cookie-cutter components that are cheaper, that
7 fail to complement the rural character as stated
8 in the Master Plan.

9 A Citizen's Advisory Committee would
10 help avoid such pitfalls and ensure that the
11 community continues to have a voice in monitoring
12 the agreed-upon designs.

13 Another serious concern is the
14 environmental impact overbuilding will have on
15 the southeast corner. At a time when our air
16 quality is dangerously poor and the number of
17 children with asthma is skyrocketing, paving over
18 a green open space seems counterproductive and
19 environmentally irresponsible.

20 The proposed housing units versus open
21 space currently shown in the plan appear to be
22 out of balance and out of touch with the concerns

1 of global warming. And what we hear tonight Mr.
2 Nichols is requesting is just unconscionable.

3 Currently, the southeast corner hosts
4 a large number of old-growth trees that would be
5 destroyed under the proposed plan. Please recall
6 that the Planning Board permitted all the trees
7 on the Ashton Market and Thomas Village
8 properties be cut down without consideration for
9 their environmental and aesthetic value.

10 At this time when we are so unsure
11 about our future and are surrounded by mistrust,
12 our beautiful and treasured trees fill us with a
13 sense of security. We need to have them in our
14 lives.

15 Traffic is another very serious worry.
16 If the projected housing density is allowed, the
17 traffic will overwhelm the intersection and
18 drivers with reroute to Tucker Lane, a winding
19 roller coaster of a road.

20 The Porter Road development will
21 become another shortcut as a means to avoid
22 commuter snarl and will result in a massive

1 traffic jam coming in and out very close to the
2 High School.

3 The Ashton Village Center has the
4 potential to be a welcoming rural village
5 crossroads highlighted by an environmentally
6 responsible green space. Please recognize the
7 wishes and needs of the current and future
8 residents we hope to welcome, and promote the
9 rural design characteristics that honor the
10 historic and rural nature of our neighborhood.

11 Thank you very much for your time and
12 attention.

13 CHAIR ANDERSON: Thank you. Do we
14 have Jeff Schwartz on the phone? Jeff Schwartz?

15 MR. SCHWARTZ: Yes, can you hear me?

16 CHAIR ANDERSON: Yes, we hear you.
17 You can go ahead whenever you're ready.

18 MR. SCHWARTZ: Hi, I'm Jeff Schwartz.
19 I'm the owner of Ashton Manor Environmental in
20 Ashton. A former resident. I used to live
21 behind the shopping center. I have a Master's
22 Degree in Environmental Science with a land use

1 planning concentration.

2 I'm on the call tonight to speak
3 towards the zoning issues. I don't have the same
4 concerns about the traffic. I think speaking --
5 I keep hearing the term rural community, rural
6 character is mentioned however many hundred times
7 in the Master Plan, and I think it's important
8 just to remember that that's a completely
9 subjective term.

10 And if you brought somebody from other
11 parts of the County in the ag reserve area, I
12 think there's people that would find a difference
13 of opinion that we are still trying to call this
14 and preserve a rural community.

15 I think good zoning has to go hand in
16 hand. Good zoning is going to lead to good
17 architecture, is going to lead to good
18 development, and all of that has an underlying
19 economic component to it. And the economics do
20 need to work.

21 And I think as much I've heard
22 negative about Thomas Village, yes, trees were

1 cut down there. It was done in accordance with
2 approved plans. Trees were lost. New homes were
3 built.

4 Those homes sold at record paces
5 before the latest sort of housing boom, and I
6 think that it brought diversity to our community.
7 People that couldn't afford single-family houses.
8 People that want to live in this area but
9 couldn't afford it.

10 And I think that if anything, we hear
11 all these people that are long-term residents of
12 this area, it sounds a lot like NIMBY. We're
13 here now, nobody else can come. And a component
14 of that is making housing units cost a certain
15 amount of money which changes when you get into
16 single-family.

17 I don't have any problem with what
18 Thomas Village is. I think it's very much in
19 line with what is being developed and built in
20 this County and other areas. The evidence to me
21 is how quickly they were sold. There's been
22 resales in there that have sold so quickly. It's

1 a desirable product.

2 And for people that currently live
3 here to be passing the judgment that it isn't
4 acceptable, and it's not this, and it's not that.
5 The fact is the community, the County the Market
6 Place is saying actually that's what we're
7 craving and we're craving more of it.

8 I think the history shows development
9 can happen in this area. The Ashton Market Place
10 I believe will dramatically improve water quality
11 in that area. The level of onsite runoff
12 treatment erosion is going to be fantastically
13 improved to what it was when that site was
14 sitting there for many, many years.

15 This site can be developed in an
16 environmentally sensitive way and it will be.
17 There's many, many examples through the County,
18 through Ashton/Sandy Spring. The regulations in
19 place do just that.

20 I think that the safety concern --
21 back to the multi-use, I believe if you look
22 anywhere in this County, we are going to, we're

1 seeing getting away from the single-family homes
2 and more to the multi-family, multi-use
3 arrangement because of the diversity they allow,
4 because of the need, and the differences they can
5 bring to a community.

6 So, I think that this property can be
7 developed. The numbers don't exactly, you know,
8 150 units of this or that. They can be done in a
9 way that is aesthetically pleasing,
10 environmentally sound within the Master Plan, and
11 at the end of the day still be economically
12 feasible.

13 And I think that we're talking about
14 an area that is not going to dramatically impact
15 this "rural nature" of the farms on the
16 outskirts. It's not like we're bringing this
17 development out to a pasture where there's lamb
18 and sheep right now.

19 Thank you for listening. That's my
20 testimony.

21 CHAIR ANDERSON: Thank you very much.
22 We had a late person sign up to testify. His

1 first name is Dan, his last name I don't have.

2 Are you there Dan?

3 MR. SNYDER: I am, and my last name is
4 -- can you hear me?

5 CHAIR ANDERSON: Yes.

6 MR. SNYDER: My last name is --

7 CHAIR ANDERSON: What's your last
8 name?

9 MR. SNYDER: -- Snyder.

10 CHAIR ANDERSON: Dan Snyder.

11 MR. SNYDER: -- S-N-Y-D-E-R, yes.

12 CHAIR ANDERSON: Okay.

13 MR. SNYDER: But before everybody
14 realizes, not that Dan Snyder.

15 CHAIR ANDERSON: Yes, wrong part of
16 the County.

17 MR. SNYDER: Although we are looking,
18 we're 1 and 0 in Washington so maybe things are
19 turning around.

20 I appreciate the opportunity to
21 testify tonight and kind of share my thoughts.
22 I'm a long-term resident of Ashton, lived as well

1 behind, in the townhouses behind the shopping
2 center, the strip center, and now live in the
3 rear of Spring Lawn Farm.

4 You know, I've had the opportunity to
5 talk to a number of the neighbors here, and you
6 know, one of the regrets that they have is not
7 being able to walk to, you know, a very
8 commercial opportunity where we have the retail
9 and the restaurant options and stuff that's
10 desirable.

11 Obviously, you know, it needs to be
12 done in a way that's tasteful and a way that
13 complements the site. But I feel strongly that
14 staff's recommendation with the plan with the .5
15 FAR is required to get that quality architecture
16 and to get the quality product and to make it
17 feasible.

18 I think if we don't have that kind of
19 opportunity there, you're going to end up with
20 another CVS on that corner. And that's what
21 drove that first CVS was not being able to come
22 to a resolution and come to an agreement of what

1 makes good sense.

2 You know, just as the previous
3 testifier said, you know, when I drive through
4 Ashton I see, you know, a gas station on the
5 corner that's been there for a long time. I see
6 a strip center on the other corner. You know,
7 the development along the 108 that is nice is
8 where the Ashton Hardware was developed and that
9 kind of architecture.

10 So, I would say that, you know, as a
11 resident of the community, we really are looking
12 forward to having the opportunity to walk to some
13 of those restaurants and some of that retail.

14 And I agree we do need the crosswalks
15 up there. Obviously the fact that that pole was
16 allowed to remain there and now we have a stop
17 bar that's, you know, 300 feet back from an
18 intersection to allow the trucks to turn, that's
19 not an acceptable solution.

20 So, but just in closing, and I'll be
21 brief, I would 100 percent support the plan, 100
22 percent support, you know, the tasteful

1 development of that corner. Thank you very much.

2 CHAIR ANDERSON: Thank you. And that
3 concludes our speakers tonight. As I mentioned
4 before, the public record is open for another
5 week if you have any comments you want to submit
6 in writing, and you're always welcome to talk to
7 the staff at any time.

8 We really appreciate all of the
9 participation from members of the public and also
10 the work that the staff put on, not just the
11 planners but also our IT staff and administrative
12 folks who are here in our auditorium in Wheaton
13 with us staying here late, thank you all very
14 much. And we're adjourned.

15 (Whereupon, the above-entitled matter
16 went off the record at 8:05 p.m.)

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In the matter of: Ashton Village Sector Plan

Before: MNCPPC

Date: 09-17-20

Place: teleconference

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