

## Item 6 - Correspondence

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**Subject:** Ashton Village Center Sector Plan  
**Date:** Wednesday, November 18, 2020 11:44:49 AM

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This testimony is submitted on behalf of the Ashton Alliance (formerly “Ashton Area Homeowners and Civic Association Alliance”).

Ashton sits on a crossroads in an area with a rich history that is still reflected in the working farms and historic structures that surround the village center. The implementation of this Plan will determine how the rural character of the village is retained. Of paramount importance to maintaining this rural character is how the southeast corner of the intersection of New Hampshire Avenue and Maryland Route 108 is developed. This corner is the main undeveloped piece of property within the Plan area and represents the entryway into the village center from both the south and the east. Without enforceable design guidelines and development that is consistent in size and scale with a rural village, Ashton will forever lose its unique character. We have seen similar issues with the construction of Thomas Village in Sandy Spring. The lack of specific guidelines led to the development of townhomes that follow the vague guidelines, but do not fit in with the surrounding area.

As residents of the Ashton area, we strongly urge the Planning Board to retain the following provisions in the Ashton Village Center Sector Plan that is transmitted to the County Council:

- <!--[if !supportLists]-->• <!--[endif]-->Specific mandatory design guidelines that are included in the Plan rather than as a separate document;
- <!--[if !supportLists]-->• <!--[endif]-->Implementation of an advisory committee with the authority to engage meaningfully in the implementation of the Plan;
- <!--[if !supportLists]-->• <!--[endif]-->Intersection improvements that will enhance traffic flow and pedestrian safety;
- <!--[if !supportLists]-->• <!--[endif]-->Retention of a maximum building height of 40 feet and a FAR of no more than 0.5C and 0.5R on the southeast corner of the intersection of Route 108 and New Hampshire Avenue;

• Completion of sidewalks and side paths where they are missing; and

• Provision of adequate onsite parking and green space on the southeast corner to minimize impacts on adjacent neighborhoods.

Our concerns include:

• Significant increases in the number of allowable units on the southeast corner where there is inadequate public transportation and will result in loss of rural character;

• No conceptual plans that provide the community with a clear understanding and expectation of what will actually be built.

Many community members, both private residents and business partners, have participated in the development of the Ashton Village Center Sector Plan, attending design workshops, community meetings, the public hearing, and the virtual Planning Board meetings. However, we still do not feel we have a clear understanding of the intentions of the developer as to what will actually be built on the southeast corner. The staff has indicated that the 150 units identified in the appendix to the Plan would be the maximum number of units that could be built on the site and that the actual number would be far less. However, there is no clear indication of what that number would be. At a community meeting in January 2020, the Planning staff presented conceptual drawings, including one that yielded 101 units. The overwhelming reaction from the community, as expressed in the meeting and in letters to the Planning Board, was that this was significantly more than what is appropriate for a rural community.

We urge the Board to hold another work session where a clear understanding of what can actually be built on the southeast corner will be provided to the community prior to the Ashton Village Sector Plan being transmitted to the County Council. While virtual meetings make continuing the process along during the pandemic more feasible, rushing the Plan through the process does not allow appropriate amount of time for the Community to review the plethora of documents that are produced.

As recent as the first work session, members of the Planning Board had not physically seen the Thomas Village Subdivision and the impact it has had on Sandy Spring. Instead a virtual tour was provided. Although helpful, no virtual tour can take the place of a physical one, which would have allowed for a more informed

discussion of the concerns and merits of the Plan. We are hopeful that Planning Board members have been able to tour prior to the second work session.

We urge the Planning Board to include an Advisory Board as recommended in the draft Plan, and that that Advisory Board in conjunction with the County and future developers ensure compliance with the plan guidelines. Because the future of Ashton is critical to retaining one of the few remaining small historic areas in the County, the implementation advisory committee is of utmost importance. It would provide an opportunity to monitor and ensure implementation of all the provisions of the Plan. Many of the provisions require coordination and funding from outside the Planning Commission and would benefit from community input and engagement. It is a much needed communication and oversight tool. The advisory committee could provide focus and community support for the necessary funding and coordination needed from the County and State.

Ashton is a special place and we hope that the Board will ensure that the provisions of the Plan will ensure it remains so. Many residents of the Community are excited for the modernization of Ashton, and look forward to being able to finally walk along the road without the fear of oncoming traffic or the lack of walkways. That being said, ensuring all the proper information is received and discussed is of the utmost importance moving forward.

Kathleen Wheeler  
Ashton Alliance