

From: Folden, Matthew
Sent: Monday, March 29, 2021 12:11 PM
To: Ashley Brown <ashleyebrown@gmail.com>
Cc: Councilmember.Hucker@montgomerycountymd.gov; Dickel, Stephanie <Stephanie.Dickel@montgomeryplanning.org>; Hisel-McCoy, Elza <Elza.Hisel-McCoy@montgomeryplanning.org>; Kronenberg, Robert <robert.kronenberg@montgomeryplanning.org>; MCP-Chair <mcp-chair@mncppc-mc.org>
Subject: RE: Montgomery County Development Plan Concerns

Ms. Brown,

Thank you for your comments regarding the Mandatory Referral for the architecture and site design associated with the new Headquarters of the Housing Opportunity Commission of Montgomery County (HOC) in Downtown Silver Spring. By copy of this response, I am forwarding your comments to the Planning Board Chair's office for inclusion in the public record associated with this project.

For your reference, Mandatory Referral Application No. 20210013 seeks advisory comments from the Planning Board regarding the proposed building architecture and site design of this new office building. In accordance with State Law, the Planning Board's comments on mandatory referral applications are not binding on public agencies. The Subject Application builds upon a previous mandatory referral, MR2021002, which focused on the appropriateness of the Subject Property as the site of a new HOC HQ office building. MR2021002 was reviewed and endorsed by the Planning Board as part of their regular meeting on October 15, 2020.

Staff acknowledges the concerns you raise about the impact of the proposed building on views and natural light, privacy, and construction. The proposed HOC office building will have a significant impact on the views and sunlight for the Octave's west-facing units. Those units currently get the benefit of abutting an existing surface parking lot located on a very desirable site within walking distance of transit, the Capital Crescent Trail, the South County Recreation and Aquatic Center currently under construction, parks, and of course Downtown Silver Spring. Any feasible redevelopment of this surface parking lot is going to have a similar impact. The new building will be set back from the shared property line between 12 and 16 feet, resulting in a separation between buildings of approximately 24 feet. In an urban context this is a compatible relationship.

Similarly, while the office building is proposed with windows facing the Octave, staff would highlight that the new building would generally be occupied primarily on weekdays and not on evenings and weekends. The proposed windows provide the people working in the building a very desirable connection to the outside. Again, in an urban context this is a compatible relationship.

Finally, it is inevitable that any redevelopment of the existing surface parking lot next to the Octave will have construction impacts. The construction will be in compliance with all County requirements, including work hours, as directed by the County Department of Permitting Services and Department of Environmental Protection.

Thank you again for providing the comments. Our correspondence will be included in the Staff Report to the Planning Board for their review and consideration as part of the public process associated with the Subject Mandatory Referral. Please let us know if you have any questions.

Respectfully,

Matthew Folden, AICP | Planner Coordinator
DownCounty Planning Division
301.495.4539 | matthew.folden@montgomeryplanning.org



WE'VE MOVED!

THE NEW PARK AND PLANNING HEADQUARTERS IS NOW LOCATED AT
2425 REEDIE DRIVE, WHEATON, MD 20902

Ashley E. Brown
1320 Fenwick Ln
Silver Spring, MD 20910

March 11, 2021

Matthew Folden, AICP
Planning Coordinator
Montgomery County Planning Department
8787 Georgia Avenue
Silver Spring, Maryland 20910

RE: Notice of Application – MR2021013

Dear Mr. Folden,

This letter serves as a record of my public comment to oppose approval for the Montgomery County Development Application for the Housing Opportunities Commission of Montgomery County, Md. Headquarters (MP2021013) at the southeast corner of Second Ave and Fenwick Ln in Silver Spring.

I am an owner/resident of the Octave 1320 condominium, in a unit that would be directly impacted by this development if it goes forward. My heart dropped when I opened the mail to see this development proposal. I didn't see lines on a paper. I saw my actual life, and my home, to which I've largely been confined during the COVID-19 pandemic yet still comforted by its quiet and natural light -- My home, which I've worked so hard to obtain with absolutely no financial assistance from anyone else, dim with the prospect of this application.

Those are incredibly personal reasons for my opposition, but there's a larger pattern at play in what I and my neighbors stand to lose here. So in your consideration of this application, I ask you to also consider the following:

The Octave is a young and racially-diverse community of owners and residents.

Please consider that according to the county's own studies, while Black and Latinx residents are the largest racial minorities in the county¹, they still have the lowest home ownership rates in the county².

Please consider that The Octave was conceived and billed as a way to help first-time buyers achieve the harder-and-harder goal of affordable homeownership³ in Montgomery County and the greater Washington region.

Please consider that having a view obstructed can lower home values by up to 10% by some measures.⁴

¹ [Montgomery County Trends](#) - Montgomery County Planning Dept. / MNCPPC, January 2019

² [Racial Equity in Housing in Montgomery County](#) - Montgomery County Council/Office of Legislative Oversight, Summer 2019

³ [New condos in downtown Silver Spring designed for first-time buyers](#) - Washington Post, 14 July 2015

⁴ [This is How Much a Home's View is Worth](#) - Marketwatch, 8 April 2018

Please consider the negative environmental impact of new construction⁵, and that, again, according to a study posted on the county's own site, "Black and Latinx residents are exposed to environmental toxins at disproportionate rates, leading to health disparities in many chronic conditions."⁶

And please consider that I note all of this as a Black woman who was a first-time homebuyer when I purchased this property from another Black first-time homebuyer in late 2018.

I can't conceive of any way in which my health and peace won't be negatively impacted by a new construction just steps from my unit.

I can't conceive of any way in which the natural light that comes into my home, already largely obstructed by the county parking garage on one side, won't be even more obstructed by an office building so close that I could fly a paper plane into it from my balcony.

I can't conceive of a way for me to comfortably maintain my privacy with both a parking garage and an office building literal steps from my window. And I can't conceive of any way in which this won't negatively impact an updated appraisal of my home's value.

There appears to be a huge irony apparent in the fact that the county wants to allow its Housing Opportunities Commission to headquarter itself in a location that stands to trash the home values, privacy, and health of a diverse homeownership community right next door.

We may be a small community of condo dwellers, to be certain. But if you look at the arc of history and codified development practices that have left hard-working people – largely, people of color – at a systemic disadvantage, this is how it happens: one small decision at a time that values bureaucracy and profit over people.

For that reason, among many others, I ask you to and the county to please reject this application.

Sincerely,



Ashley E. Brown

⁵ [New Buildings: Embodied Carbon](#) - Architecture 2030, 2018

⁶ [Racial Equity in Housing in Montgomery County](#) - Montgomery County Council/Office of Legislative Oversight, Summer 2019