

Item 7 - Correspondence

From: [Deborah Chalfie](#)
To: [MCP-Chair](#)
Cc: [Coello, Catherine](#)
Subject: Statement for the 5/19/22 public hearing record from Art Deco Society of Washington re: Crossroads of Kensington
Date: Wednesday, May 18, 2022 11:27:46 AM
Attachments: [ADSW stmt re Crossroads of Kensington 5-19-22.pdf](#)

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Dear Chair Anderson,

Please find attached the written statement of the Art Deco Society of Washington for tomorrow's public hearing on the Crossroads of Kensington development proposal. Shortly, I will also send slides of the photos in the appendix to Ms. Coello in preparation for my remote oral testimony.

Many thanks,
Deborah Chalfie, ADSW Preservation Chair
202-375-1856
P.O. Box 42722
Washington, DC. 20015



May 19, 2022

Via Email

Casey Anderson, Chair
Montgomery County Planning Board
2425 Reddie Dr., 14th floor
Wheaton, MD 20902

Re: Crossroads of Kensington: Site Plan No. 820220030

Dear Chairman Anderson and Members of the Planning Board:

Founded in 1982, the Art Deco Society of Washington (ADSW) is a nonprofit membership organization encompassing the Washington DC region, whose mission is to foster awareness of, celebrate, and preserve the architectural, decorative, industrial, and cultural arts of the Art Deco era and adjacent modern movements of the 20th Century, including Midcentury Modern. Architectural preservation is a strong element of our mission. For example, in the 1980s, ADSW actively led the fight to preserve and restore the Silver Theatre and Shopping Center at Colesville & Georgia. More recently, we supported the creation of the Potomac Overlook Historic District and the proposed evaluation of Weller's Cleaners – among other Historic Resources proposals – in the Silver Spring Downtown and Adjacent Communities Plan. ADSW also participated in the proceedings before the Office of Zoning and Administrative Hearings and Board of Appeals during the last proposed development of this 10619 Connecticut Ave. site, which was a self-storage facility. We appreciate the opportunity to submit our views – and a request – regarding this new proposed development.

Connecticut Avenue is one of the country's and our region's great boulevards, and the corner of Connecticut Ave. and Pylers Mill Rd. is a major, prominent intersection in Kensington's Town Center. The site where the Crossroads of Kensington (CoK) development is being proposed, at 10619 Connecticut Ave. is, indeed, in many ways a crossroads and gateway to Kensington's Town Center core. It is thus important that this site be developed in a way that comports with the town's vision "to reinvigorate the Town Center while preserving Kensington's scale and historic character,"¹ and to "create an active and vibrant Town Center."²

If approved as proposed, the CoK development at this gateway site will be a two-building, one-story, single-use (retail), strip center with 5-6 tenants. If the developer's website is up to date, the

¹ Montgomery County Planning Dept., *Kensington Sector Plan* at 1 (May 2012), available at <https://www.montgomeryplanning.org/community/kensington/documents/Kensingtonapprovedandadoptedfinal8-22-13.pdf>.

² *Id.*, at 19.

tenants thus far appear to be a drive-through M&T bank; Mezeh, a national fast-casual chain similar to Cava; and a take-out-only version of the national chain Buffalo Wild Wings.³ A breezeway in the center will connect the two buildings, with parking in the rear. Tables and chairs will be placed around the perimeter of the corner near a widened sidewalk, and within the covered breezeway. And, as proposed, ADSW is deeply disappointed that CoK would demolish the futuristic "Googie" (think Jetsons!) gas station now on the site.

Clearly, this proposed development is preferable to the earlier self-storage facility proposal in several respects. First, the small scale and massing of the building make it less looming and more accessible, very similar to the one-story Kensington Shopping Center across the street. Although the Town had hoped for a mixed-use development, the all-retail plan seems fine, and the additional retail will be welcome. Unlike the Kensington Shopping Center, the CoK parking lot is hidden away in the back rather than being out front, which will put storefronts somewhat closer to pedestrians. The plan provides two ingress/egress points, directly via Connecticut and via Metropolitan Ave. by virtue of an easement through the adjacent back property. Unlike a self-storage facility, the center can be counted on to generate some activity; the outdoor seating and planned landscaping should help a bit.

However, ADSW believes this proposed development could be so much better, and better accomplish the goals of the Town of Kensington and the Planning Board for a more vibrant, appealing, and active Town Center, if the developers could find a way to refurbish and incorporate the gas station building as part of the project.

The Planning Board Staff Report on CofK recommends approval and says that the site is suitable for redevelopment without the gas station.⁴ But, here is what virtually the same staff team so eloquently stated about the same gas station, on the same site, less than 3 years ago:

The Subject Property is the site of the vacant E-Z Sinclair Service Station. This Googie-styled gas station was constructed in 1961, and it is highlighted in the Inventory of Montgomery Modern buildings and Districts and noted in the book *Montgomery Modern*.

The Googie-style is an exuberant commercial style of architecture first popularized in Los Angeles in the late 1950s. The style is characterized by sweeping lines, cantilevered and steep sloping roof angles, exuberant use of color, glass and metal materials, and an automobile or service commercial orientation to the business. Commercial Googie-styled architecture is rare in Montgomery County; the few remaining examples of this style have been altered and many no longer retain high degrees of integrity.

This gas station is an excellent example of the Googie-style as applied to a gas station and appears to be the only such example remaining in the County. The County's Montgomery Modern Initiative is meant to highlight and bring awareness of the history and significance of midcentury modern architecture to the general public and property owners. *The adaptive*

³ H&R Retail, Established Retail: Site Plan, Kensington Crossing website, available at <https://media-cloud-app.s3-accelerate.amazonaws.com/2020/12/Kensington-Crossing-SP-05-03-22eAP.pdf>.

⁴ Montgomery Planning, *Staff Report on Crossroads of Kensington: Site Plan No. 820220030*, at 26 (completed 5-9-2022), available at https://montgomeryplanningboard.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/Staff-report_820220030_Crossroads-of-Kensington_FINAL.pdf [hereinafter *Staff Report*].

*reuse potential for this building, with its corner location and high degree of architectural integrity, should be explored as part of any redevelopment proposal for this site.*⁵

The “exuberant” architecture and historical significance of the gas station and the characteristics of the site have not changed during this time, only what is being proposed in its stead.

Moreover, it does not appear that the adaptive reuse potential for this building or a different configuration was ever explored as part of any redevelopment proposal for this site. Yes, this is a challenging site. However, the gas station could have easily been incorporated into the development had the owners combined the two properties from the beginning. The adjacent property already will play a central role in the CoK development by providing an easement through which cars can enter and exit to Metropolitan Ave. Also, the Staff Report appears to dangle the prospect of expanding the development to the adjacent rear property: “[t]he modest scale of the proposed development will not preclude a mixed-use development on this [rear] Property in the future.”⁶ Including the adjacent rear property in the development would have made the site much less challenging. Now, though, even if the eventual expansion comes to pass, the gas station will be long gone, as will the myriad of enlivening and appealing ways in which it could have been adaptively reused.

The historic and architecturally attention-grabbing nature of old gas stations tends to attract creative and dynamic uses. Appended to this testimony are photos of just a handful of examples of the many ways in which historic gas stations have been repurposed elsewhere. In cities across the country, gas stations have been adaptively converted into hip, animated bars, coffee shops, diners, BBQ joints, high end restaurants, and many other fun places.⁷ The outdoor seating that is proposed for CoK helps, but the fact is, without something exciting to attract and keep people there, it is unlikely anyone will want to hang out on that busy, noisy traffic corner any longer than the time it takes to eat their fast-casual meal. The current plan needs more street appeal, a “sense of place” feeling, a “cool” factor. Incorporation of the gas station would make the proposed redevelopment much more vibrant and activating, and immediately identifiable as a long-time Kensington landmark.

If Kensington foregoes a more urban, activating project now, it will set an unfortunate precedent for future redevelopment projects. CoK may be a more stimulating proposal than the self-storage proposal, but in its current form, it is unlikely to sufficiently elevate the Town Center’s architectural and commercial environment. It would be worth waiting a little longer to work with the developer to enable inclusion of the adjacent parcel and retention of the gas station into a really striking redevelopment.

If the developer and the Planning Board are unwilling to consider ways to use the gas station to improve the development, moving the building could be another option. Perhaps the CoK

⁵ Montgomery County Planning Dept., *Staff Report on 10619 Connecticut Avenue, Conditional Use No. CU 19-03*, at 12-13 (completed July 15, 2019) (emphasis added), available at <https://montgomeryplanningboard.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/CU-19-03-Staff-Report-FINAL-FINAL.pdf>. See also, Letter from Eileen McGuckian, President, Montgomery Preservation, Inc., to Hearing Examiner re: Conditional Use application CU 19-03 (Aug. 12, 2019) (“Indeed, the station would be an attractive focal point in coordination with whatever development is ultimately situated on this gateway property.”).

⁶ *Staff Report*, *supra* n. 4, at 19.

⁷ Adrienne Jordan, “Not Your Average Gas Station Food: 7 Amazing Restaurants in Former Fuel Stops,” *Afar* (Apr. 1 2019), available at <https://www.afar.com/magazine/not-your-average-gas-station-food-7-amazing-restaurants-in-former-fuel-stops>.

developer might consider moving the building to the rear parcel, or to another site, where it could be fixed up and made into a lively, attractive retail establishment. Or, perhaps another developer might be found to move the building. For example, as part of a larger redevelopment project at 6th & K St., NW in the District, the Douglas Development Company moved a 1927 Lord of Baltimore Filling Station from one corner to another, and it is currently being turned into a bar/restaurant with the area under the canopy targeted for outdoor seating. The relocated gas station will be part of a thoughtfully done and exciting dining complex that will include the Hodges Roast Beef Sandwich Shop originally built in 1940s, and a reconstructed Waffle Shop originally built in 1950s.⁸ None of these buildings had been designated as historic landmarks, but all three were saved, moved if necessary, reassembled, and will be reused in an exciting new development on a prominent corner.

In any case, if the Planning Board is inclined to approve the Site Plan as is, **ADSW requests that the Planning Board provide a finite but reasonable period of time between approval of the site plan and approval of any demolition permit to enable those of us interested in preserving the building to explore whether we can find a developer that might be interested in moving and reusing the building.**

On behalf of the Art Deco Society of Washington, thank you for the opportunity to share our views and consideration of our request. If you have any questions, please contact me or Steve Knight, ADSW President, at president@adsw.org.

Sincerely,



Deborah Chalfie, ADSW Preservation Chair
dchalfie@adsw.org

⁸ See Nena Perry-Brown, "The Waffle Shop and Other Nostalgic Properties Will Redefine DC Corner," *Urban Turf* (Dec. 5, 2019), available at <https://dc.urbanturf.com/articles/blog/waffle-shop-and-other-nostalgic-properties-to-redefine-mount-vernon-triangle/16212>; Paul Schwartzman, "A dozen years later, a new life for an iconic D.C. greasy spoon," *Washington Post* (July 21, 2019), available at https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/dc-politics/a-dozen-years-later-a-new-life-for-an-iconic-dc-greasy-spoon/2019/07/21/26cd972a-a8b1-11e9-a3a6-ab670962db05_story.html.

APPENDIX

Toucan Louie's, Charlotte, NC, 1955 Esso



Signal Pizza, Portland, OR, 1939 Signal Station



Starbucks, Hollywood, CA, 1935 Red Lion



(Wikimedia Commons / Junkyardsparkle)

Katalina's, Columbus, OH, 1937 unidentified gas station



Olio, St. Louis, MO, 1937 Standard Oil



Strange Brew Coffeehouse, Tupelo, MS, year and station unidentified



Vinsetta Garage, Berkley, MI, 1919 Vinsetta Garage



Joe Vaughn

All Season Brewing, LaBrea, CA, 1930s Firestone Co.

