



MONTGOMERY COUNTY COUNCIL
ROCKVILLE, MARYLAND

ANDREW FRIEDSON
COUNCILMEMBER
DISTRICT 1

MEMORANDUM

May 10, 2023

TO: Jeff Zyontz, Chair, Montgomery County Planning Board
Members of the Montgomery County Planning Board

FROM: Council Vice President Friedson, Montgomery County Council District 1

SUBJECT: Veteran's Park Civic Green in Bethesda

Earlier today, you received a memorandum from County Executive Elrich regarding an item on the Planning Board's agenda for May 11 pertaining to 7800 & 7810 Wisconsin Avenue and the potential expansion of Veteran's Park in Downtown Bethesda. The County Executive forwarded this memo to Council President Glass and to me as Chair of the Planning, Housing, and Parks (PHP) Committee, requesting that the PHP Committee conduct oversight on this matter and hold a public hearing.

I appreciate the County Executive's interest in the recommendations of the Bethesda Downtown Plan, and I am fully committed to seeing the successful implementation of its vision for our community as the District 1 Councilmember. I recognize that Maryland Land Use Article Section 17-205 grants the Planning Commission the power to dispose of or transfer property when it is determined that a property is not needed for the public interest. As such, it is critical for the Planning Board to exercise this function in a transparent manner. Residents may not always agree with the decisions made by departments, agencies, or elected officials, but they should always be afforded the opportunity and tools to understand how we go about our collective business and how decisions are made by public bodies and public officials. In light of various concerns and outstanding questions pertaining to the acquisition and disposition of these properties from residents and members of the Bethesda Downtown Plan Implementation Advisory Committee, these questions deserve to be fleshed out in a public setting and answered so the community can fully understand how we got to this point of disposition. As such, I write to ask you to conduct a public briefing of the considerations that led to the original purchase of 7800 & 7810 Wisconsin Avenue, decisions made during the regulatory review of the site plan for 7802 Wisconsin Avenue, particularly those pertaining to public benefit points/public amenities, and the ultimate decision to dispose of the two properties that is before the Planning Board.

For instance, the Staff memo for MCPB item #11 states that the Parks Department has determined that “it is not physically or financially feasible to create the envisioned Veteran’s Park Civic Green on this highly constrained urban block.” Given that 7802 was recommended by the Planning Board as a potential site for the expansion of Veteran’s Park during the development of the Bethesda Downtown Plan, how did Parks Department and the regulatory review team arrive at this determination? What factors were considered?

It would also be important to explain what outreach was done to inform the community that efforts were underway to acquire property necessary to implement the master plan recommendation to create a Veteran’s Park Civic Green.

I hope that these and other questions raised by residents and IAC members will be sufficiently answered as part of your deliberations.

I appreciate Montgomery Parks’ creative and proactive efforts to seize opportunities to implement master plan recommendations for parks and open spaces. While I recognize the sensitive nature of private land transactions, public decisions and the use of public dollars must include appropriate levels of public input. I know you share this same desire and hope you will take this opportunity to demonstrate it to the public we are all fortunate to serve.

cc: Mike Riley, Director, Parks Department
Tanya Stern, Acting Director, Planning Department
Marlene Michaelson, Executive Director, County Council