

Item 8 - Correspondence

From: [Sharon Canavan](#)
To: [MCP-Chair](#)
Subject: October 31 Agenda item on UBCP
Date: Monday, October 28, 2024 12:03:52 PM
Attachments: [2024-Planning Bd Ltr-10-28-24.docx](#)

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Please review this letter from the Northwood Four Corners Civic Association (NFCCA) before the October 31, 2024 meeting of the Montgomery County Planning Board. NFCCA is requesting a delay in further consideration of the University Boulevard Corridor Plan.



Northwood Four Corners Civic Association

October 28, 2024

Re: October 31, 2024 Agenda Item on University Boulevard Corridor Plan

Dear Planning Board Chairman and Members:

The Northwood Four Corners Civic Association (NFCCA) would like to request a delay in the Planning Board's consideration and decision on the Preliminary Recommendations and Working Draft Plan (PRWandDP) for the University Boulevard Corridor Plan (UBCP) until further citizen input on the housing-related upzoning proposals is conducted. Although NFCCA appreciates the amount of work that planning agency staff have put into developing the UBCP, we believe it is necessary to raise some concerns about the recommendations and the public information process.

A delay is justified because Planning Board decisions are being considered a mere two weeks after the latest UBCP recommendations were unveiled and virtually no time has elapsed after the virtual community meeting on October 30th and the Board's planned meeting the next day to discuss the PRWandDP. More opportunity for public evaluation and input is critical because there has been little time for the public to learn precisely where the UBCP recommends that Commercial Residential Neighborhood (CRN) housing upzoning will be located.

Furthermore, the UBCP is moving on a timeline ahead of the County Council's consideration of the related upzoning issues contained in the Attainable Housing Strategies (AHS) report. The housing elements in the UBCP should reflect the Council's ultimate deliberations regarding AHS. Also, the housing elements in the UBCP are premised on Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) running on University Blvd, a decision which has not been studied, proposed, given an opportunity for public comment, nor funded. Upzoning properties based on a yet-to-be envisioned BRT on University Boulevard is putting the cart before the horse.

At present, it appears that the Planning Board's Public Hearing on the Working Draft will be the only opportunity for citizen input before the UBCP recommendations are considered by the County Council.

Specificity regarding the housing upzoning recommendations came very late in the UBCP's public information and education process. More precise details on the areas affected by the upzoning recommendations were finally released in the series of meetings held in the last two weeks of October. The UBCP was first discussed in a public workshop in March 2023, which focused mainly on transportation challenges in the corridor. The public meeting discussion of Emerging Ideas on May 7, 2024 covered housing concepts generally and in passing (3 slides) noting that the ideas would "Retain existing residential development within neighborhoods, while promoting new residential typologies along the corridor." (Slide 23) In contrast, 10 slides were devoted to transportation-related issues. A May 22, 2024 presentation provided slightly more detail (slides 24 and 25) with a narrow yellow band indicating areas directly fronting University Boulevard for potential small housing development, again noting the goal to retain existing residential development within neighborhoods. A separate transportation-focused workshop on September 25, 2024 was held to further drill down on those issues and elicit citizens' views.

The housing concepts in the UBCP were not adequately fleshed out until the series of public meetings scheduled after October 15 (eastern portion), October 22 (western portion), and October 30 (full UBCP area conducted online.) For the first time, more precise details were made public regarding proposed upzoning of properties subject to the UBCP recommendations.

The NFCCA community is a diverse neighborhood and the housing stock here can be characterized as naturally occurring detached single family affordable housing. Current Zillow estimates on properties in the neighborhood's areas recommended for upzoning range from a low valuation of \$430,000 to the mid-\$500,000 range (except for a small number of larger infill and substantially renovated units.) Although the UBCP recommendations might produce additional affordable housing options, any new development will replace a valuable resource in this county, i.e. moderately priced detached single-family housing.

In this regard, NFCCA would like to raise an equity concern. The planning department presentations noted that 27% of the population in the UBCP area were Hispanic/Latino and 34% were either Black/African American or Asian in 2022. Notably, none of the public meetings held to date were conducted in Spanish. Given that more affordable housing units (relative to higher cost housing elsewhere in the county) lie in the UBCP plan's CRN-designated zones, it is possible the upzoning recommendations could affect an even higher percentage of Hispanic/Latino or minority property owners or renters. Now that the housing elements of the plan are available, NFCCA urges the planning department to mail notices informing households that their property lies in the recommended CRN-designated areas, including educational information about this designation (in English and Spanish), and conduct Spanish language public meetings in-person and virtually.

The NFCCA community is more significantly impacted by the upzoning recommendations in the UBCP than other neighborhoods along the corridor. This is a particularly critical point given that the October presentation contemplates upzoning approximately 200 single family properties in the NFCCA community as CRN, of which only 62 properties directly front onto University Boulevard. In the portion of the blocks straddling Dennis Avenue, the UBCP upzoning recommendations penetrate deep into the neighborhood to Edgewood Avenue.

In conclusion, NFCCA requests that the Planning Board delay its consideration of the PRWandDP until: 1) there is more time for the public to digest and study the UBCP housing-related recommendations, 2) Planning staff mail information and educational materials to affected property owners, 3) Planning staff conduct public Spanish language briefings, and 4) there is more fulsome guidance and decision-making regarding AHS and University Boulevard transportation planning, including BRT, and the County Council has moved forward with its deliberations on these proposals.

Thank you for reviewing NFCCA's concerns.

Northwood Four Corners Civic Association.

cc: Nkosi Yearwood
Zubin Adrianvala
Lisa Govoni
Carrie Sanders
Council President Friedson
Councilmember Mink
Chris Wilhelm

From: danieldorfman7@aol.com
To: [MCP-Chair](#)
Subject: University corridor rezoning plan
Date: Monday, October 28, 2024 5:45:17 PM

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Dear County Planners,

I am deeply concerned about the University Transportation Corridor rezoning plan. And I am against implementing the plan.

As a professional planner, I am keenly aware that the plan lacks credibility. The written plan discusses rezoning properties along University Blvd. However, most of the properties in the rezoning plan are not along University Blvd and not part of the transportation corridor.

The written plan determines that the transportation corridor of University Blvd included any property on any block which has a face along University Blvd. Using this definition of a transportation corridor lacks credibility. There is no rational justification for rezoning any property which is on a block which has a face along University Blvd. This definition is arbitrary, inconsistent, and sets a dangerous precedent for gerrymandering zoning rules.

This definition clearly reaches beyond the transportation corridor. Most of the properties in this rezoning plan are not part of the transportation corridor. Because most of the zoning plan is not actually along the transportation corridor I assert that the plan is not credible.

If the planning commission is rezoning, at least be honest about the plan. In this plan the proposed action of rezoning over 1,000 properties is badly disconnected from the discussion of the transportation corridor.

Please reconsider the project area and find a sensible definition for transportation corridor.

Most of the rezoning proposed here is in residential neighborhoods and not along a transportation corridor.

What is the reason for rezoning properties which are not along University Blvd?

Please provide some additional information on how and why the plan was conceived.

Thank you.

Sincerely,
Dan Dorfman

From: [Tara S. Rodgers](#)
To: [MCP-Chair](#)
Subject: UBCP feedback
Date: Wednesday, October 30, 2024 2:31:27 PM

[EXTERNAL EMAIL] Exercise caution when opening attachments, clicking links, or responding.

To the Chair of the Planning Board,

I write as a resident of North Four Corners to express concern and feedback on the University Boulevard Corridor Plan (UBCP). My feedback generally aligns with that provided to the planning board in a letter from the neighborhood civic association, the Northwood Four Corners Civic Association, dated October 28, 2024. I provide my additional feedback below and plan to share this with county council members as well.

Request for Improvements to UBCP Communication Strategy:

It is concerning that Montgomery County Planning has not notified property owners and residents directly whose homes are proposed for rezoning. We received general notices about public meetings but no direct outreach from the county that our specific property is proposed for rezoning. I only learned of the impact recently from neighbors sharing information with each other.

Moving forward, how will the county notify and gather feedback from all property owners and residents who are directly impacted by the proposed rezoning? Multi-lingual and accessible modes of outreach are also needed to reach everyone in the neighborhood.

Request for Further Impact Studies and Public Communications of Results:

A thorough assessment - conducted by an entity independent of county stakeholders - is needed of the potential impacts of increased population density and building size on neighborhood traffic, parking, utilities, pedestrian safety, public services and associated fees (e.g. water, gas & electric, internet & cell service, trash and recycling pickup). Results of these assessments need to be made public and communicated directly to residents impacted by rezoning. Montgomery County Planning owes it to taxpaying citizens to do this on a block by block basis for homes being rezoned, and to revise the UBCP proposal to address any risks or negative impacts identified in the assessment.

Note that some single family homes on impacted residential streets already serve (perhaps unofficially) as businesses, with 4-5 cars driving here and double parking twice a day during peak morning and afternoon commute times. Some homes house extended and multigenerational families with 4-6 vehicles per home needing parking. Some residential streets off University serve as pass-through streets for commuters. Given these existing use cases, the streets are not designed to handle more cars and traffic.

Possible Uses of Eminent Domain:

Can the county assure impacted residents that there will be no use of eminent domain to

reclaim property in the areas rezoned as CRN, such as to make way for parking, driveways, walkways, or widening streets to accommodate new developments? Or clarify any possible invocations of eminent domain to support UBCP?

Request to Limit Extent of Redevelopment:

Are there any limits to how much development can occur on a rezoned block?

For residential blocks being rezoned as commercial residential blocks, please consider establishing a strict zoning limit on the number of duplexes and multiunit complexes per block. It could have minimal impact to add one duplex nearby on University Blvd, but to add more than one, or say 3-4 multiunit buildings on the 1-2 blocks off University, would create significant changes and challenges with parking and traffic on residential streets. Data from the above-mentioned impact studies could inform what limits are established.

Impacts on Existing Home Affordability and Neighborhood Diversity:

By upzoning single family homes to CRN, property values on affected single family homes will likely take a hit due to uncertainties over construction and changes to traffic and parking in the neighborhood. Many of us bought into this neighborhood precisely because it was more affordable for single family homes than other areas of Montgomery County or DC (with single family home prices at around \$350K-\$550K over the past 10 years). This neighborhood has given people a chance to start building wealth through homeownership, only to have the county now set in motion these plans that may diminish it.

Likewise, several neighbors on the block who have been renting long-term were likely drawn to the area for its relatively affordable housing and may be displaced when landlords are incentivized by the UBCP to sell those homes to developers.

This neighborhood is characterized by racial, cultural, linguistic, and economic diversity - a microcosm of what makes Silver Spring one of the most diverse areas in the United States. Paradoxically, the parts of this plan that would rezone residential blocks seem to penalize a diverse group of neighbors who are benefiting from affordable housing at this time, in order to advance a plan for affordable housing that will negatively impact or displace some current residents while enabling outside developers to profit.

I encourage pursuit of a better balance in the plan that revamps existing commercial areas rather than rezoning residential blocks to CRN. I request that you delay advancing the plan until the concerns outlined above are thoroughly accounted for.

Thank you for considering this. If possible, I prefer that you not circulate my comments publicly alongside my name. If you are not the right contact for this feedback, please let me know to whom I should send this.

Sincerely,
T.S. Rodgers