



Bethesda Downtown Implementation Advisory Committee Est. 2017

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Montgomery County Planning Board
2425 Reedie Drive, 14th Floor
Wheaton, MD 20902

RE: Aksoylu Properties Extension Request

Dear Chair Harris and Members of the Planning Board:

The Bethesda Implementation Advisory Committee (IAC), created in the 2017 Bethesda Downtown Plan, has been meeting monthly since soon after the Plan was approved, to review plans for Plan implementation. The Committee is comprised of seven residential and seven commercial representatives.

A number of projects that were proposed and approved by the Planning Board soon after the Plan was finalized have languished for a variety of reasons. One such project is a large multi-family development, slated to encompass a large parcel located between Wisconsin and Woodmont Avenues, just south of Cordell Avenue. The parcel includes what was once one of the few surface public parking lots in downtown Bethesda (Lot 43), which has now been closed for several years pending construction of the proposed project.

The property, situated along the prominent gateway into downtown Bethesda, is derelict and in a very sad state of disrepair. The various buildings on the site, occupied by different businesses over the years, have sat vacant for over ten years in some instances. The abandoned structures have attracted unhoused individuals, have been broken into countless times, have been the location of illegal dumping and are very unattractive indeed. Appendix A provides a timeline for key development on the site.

We understand that the property owner, Aksoylu Properties, has applied for an extension of Adequate Public Facilities and Preliminary Plan for the parcel at 8008 Wisconsin Avenue. A hearing on this request has been tentatively scheduled for March 5, 2026.

The IAC would oppose this extension unless a series of conditions are met, including:

1. Demolition and removal of existing structures; site cleanup
2. Installation of a secure, uniform and attractive perimeter fence

3. Reactivation of the county surface parking lot (Lot 43), until construction of the project begins.

In addition, the extension request for 8008 Wisconsin letter dated September 20, 2025 states that: "The Project's Site Plan also requires the payment of \$694,323 for improvements to Battery Lane Urban Park." This requirement was originally from 2016. However, in 2019 the Parks Department completed significant improvements to that park (the playground equipment was past its safe, useful life and there were a number of repairs and upgrades that could not wait any longer). Therefore, this assignment of funds should be reviewed for other priorities.

Thank you for considering the perspectives of the IAC as you consider requests for project extensions. Commercial Co-Chair, Matt Gordon has recused himself from this matter, as he previously represented the petitioner. Otherwise, the perspectives herein represent the unanimous view of the IAC on the Aksoylu site and extension request. Please reach out to Andy O'Hare to address any questions about our collective views. Mr. O'Hare may be reached at andy.ohare@yahoo.com or (202) 270-0094.

Regards,

Bethesda Implementation Advisory Committee

Appendix A: Project Timeline

A timeline of developments substantiates a very long period of inactivity at the site with continued ongoing deterioration:

- 2014: Ranger Surplus closed
- 2015: Ahmet Aksoylu expressed optimism about the project:
"I look forward to working very closely with the Bethesda community and Montgomery County to develop a successful mixed-use project of which we can all be very proud," Ahmet Aksoylu, president of Aksoylu Properties said in a statement. "This project will contribute to the economic growth of the county and increase the inventory of the county's affordable housing stock through strategic redevelopment of underperforming public parcels in downtown Bethesda."
- 2015: Aksoylu Properties selected by County DOT to utilize county parking lot 43 for affordable housing associated with the planned multi-family project
- 2016: Dunmor's Bethesda "Beer House" Closed
- 2019: Official Transfer of Parking Lot 43 to developer
- 2019: Site Plan (820190040) Resolution for 8000 Wisconsin Ave (up to 410,000 sq ft residential; 25% MPDUs; up to 20,000 sq feet commercial)
- 2022: Sapphire Café Closes
- 2023: Properties fall into serious disrepair; Door and windows broken; Illegal squatting
- 2023: Parking Lot 43 Closed to Public Use
- 2023: Aksoylu Acquires 8008 Wisconsin Property from Toll Brothers Development and aggregates it with 8000 Wisconsin Avenue (Preliminary Plan 120160050 approved 2016; extended in 2023; expired October 16, 2025).
- 2024, 2025: Dumping on the Properties Increases.