



Jeffrey Z. Slavin
Mayor

TOWN OF SOMERSET

4510 Cumberland Avenue
Chevy Chase, MD 20815
301-657-3211
town@townofsomerset.com



Rich Charnovich
Town Manager/Clerk-Treasurer

Statement of Jeffrey Z. Slavin, Mayor of Somerset

Chairman Casey Anderson and Members of the Planning Board, thank you for this opportunity. With me today are two members of our Town Council.

We have been participating in the discussions of the sector plan for more than a year and have appreciated the willingness of the Planning Department staff to work with us.

Somerset is a caring community. We are excited about the possibilities for improvements in Westbard—new shops, green space, sit-down cafes. In addition, we welcome economic diversity in our area, which new housing can bring. And we like the plan's environmental vision, especially daylighting the Willett Branch.

Westbard is a suburban area that is primarily auto oriented and is surrounded by single family homes. It is not a metro stop nor does it have much public transit. Our residents want to feel that their neighborhood is respected and that they get real benefits from the development envisioned in the plan.

Somerset residents have expressed some concerns about the possible effects of planned development. A major issue is how densely the site is developed because too much density can lead to more traffic and to over-crowding of our schools. Many parents, including parents from Somerset, turned out for earlier meetings with the Planning Department staff to discuss potential school over-crowding and feel very strongly about this issue. You will be hearing from at least two speakers today who will talk about school overcrowding. One of the speakers is from Somerset and is familiar with the Bethesda Chevy Chase cluster and the other is from the Whitman cluster. We realize that the Montgomery County Public Schools have participated in the planning process, but given that most schools in the area are over capacity, concerns remain.

Another major Somerset concern is about potential increases in cut-through traffic and the safety of our children who walk to Somerset Elementary School, as well as other pedestrians like dog

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walkers, and bikers. The plan is mainly silent on the potential effects of the plan on cut-through traffic in neighborhoods. During the November charrettes, Somerset representatives asked that the county's study include the intersection of Dorset and Little Falls, but unfortunately residential intersections were not included in the county's study.

To protect the safety of our residents, we request that the plan require the county to monitor cut-through traffic on Dorset Avenue in conjunction with each approval of each development phase and/or each significant project site plan approval. If cut-through traffic increases significantly, then the county will need to take mitigation measures. In this way, children walking to Somerset Elementary School, children biking to Westland Middle School, and other pedestrians, as well as bikers, can be better protected from cut-through traffic.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the draft plan. I'd like to turn now to my council colleagues who will be discussing other issues.