



Jeffrey Z. Slavin
Mayor



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Rich Charnovich
Town Manager/Clerk-Treasurer

Statement for the Record from the Town of Somerset

Chairman Casey Anderson and Members of the Planning Board,

Three officials from the Town of Somerset presented oral testimony at the September 24, 2015 hearing. This statement covers some of the same points but it adds material that would not fit into the time allotted during the hearing.

The Town has been pleased to participate in the planning process for an update of the Westbard Sector Plan. Members of our community have attended many public meetings and we also belong to the Citizens Coordinating Committee on Friendship Heights (CCCFH). CCCFH did a survey and sponsored the Catholic University Study on Westbard some years ago and has been active in the deliberations on the Westbard Plan update.

We are grateful to the Planning Department staff for their efforts. The staff has spent many hours listening to Somerset and CCCFH representatives and residents in the area who attended multiple hearings, and the draft plan shows that the staff listened to many community concerns.

Many elements of the vision of the draft plan are attractive to Somerset. We are excited about the possibilities for improvements in Westbard—new shops, green space, and 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.

We would briefly like to summarize some of our reactions to elements in the Plan and make some recommendations that we think should be considered so that as the Plan gets built out, it

"Where People and Trees Have Deep Roots and Grow Strong"

will be deemed a success by Somerset residents, nearby neighbors, and those who live and work in Westbard.

Two concerns we have often heard in Somerset are worries about school overcrowding and increases in cut-through traffic.

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. 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. The Plan identifies some possible approaches. **An approach that could be added to the list is to maintain institutional zoning on the Washington Episcopal School site so that if the school ever decided to move, MCPS could purchase the 10 acre site for a new school.**

Cut-through traffic: 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 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.

There are a number of other issues we would like to comment on.

Housing types: Somerset likes having a mix of housing types in Westbard, and the Plan provides several types of housing. We want to see options for seniors in the Westbard Plan so that as our residents age, they can stay nearby. We think that town houses are best on sites near the neighborhoods of Springfield, Westwood and Westbard Mews, and Kenwood. Some Somerset residents strongly support plans to include affordable housing in the Westbard Plan. We have attached their petition supporting affordable housing to this statement.

River Road: Somerset supports the Plan's vision of River Road as a boulevard with wide sidewalks, trees, and green space. These improvements will make River Road attractive to pedestrians and bikers and provide an alternative to cars. Reduction in curb cuts will make River Road safer for pedestrians and bikers. **The addition of a light at Landy Lane will also increase pedestrian safety.** Getting from one side of River Road to the other is a challenge with 4-5 moving lanes of traffic. A traffic light at Landy Lane will make it safer to cross this busy road. That will not only help seniors, but also school children from several nearby schools. In addition, it will encourage bus transportation by making it safer to cross River Road to use the bus stops. However, we are uncertain that the plan's proposal to add a cycle lane on a state highway is something that the Maryland State Highway Administration guidelines permit. **Therefore we encourage the staff to ascertain whether a cycle lane is possible on River Road.** We think that any bike facility on River Road that does not extend to the Friendship Heights metro, for example via Willard, will be of little benefit. **We recommend consideration**

of a bike path from Westbard to the Friendship Heights Metro in the County Right of Way. We also favor substantial setbacks of buildings so that there isn't a canyon effect on River Road. River Road is residential on both sides of Westbard so more residential development on River Road is in keeping with adjacent road segments. **Frequent and reliable shuttle bus service is essential for reducing automobile traffic.**

Willett Branch and green space: Somerset applauds the Plan's emphasis on environmental issues and its goals for new park spaces that include neighborhood spaces and a Countywide Urban Park that could include a dog park. We especially commend the plan for its vision of a daylighted Willett Branch and transforming the Willet Branch from a storm drain to a greenway.

Light industrial zoning: Somerset residents support maintaining the existing industrial zoning. Residents like to be able to drop off cars for repairs and walk home and walk to the vet, among other services.

Funding of the Plan's Vision: The Plan identifies lead agencies for a variety of public realm and infrastructure projects. For example, the Montgomery County Department of Parks is recommended as the lead agency for transforming the Willett Branch to a greenway. The Plan also lists possible funding sources including the County's Capital Improvements Program. However, no price tag is attached to these projects; the cost is "to be determined". As the Westbard Plan moves through the approval process, many more specifics are needed so that the Plan's vision is fulfilled. Public realm elements in the 1982 Westbard Plan—making River Road a boulevard, improving water quality in the Willet Branch, and providing additional green space—never got funded or accomplished. We want the updated Westbard Plan to succeed so that 20 years from now, most of the public enhancements are a reality not just a dream on paper.

Recommendations from the Town of Somerset:

We have put in bold above several recommendations and listed others below.

1. 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.
2. Include non-auto related transportation projects and other public investments in the County's CIP when the Westbard Plan is considered by the County Council.
3. Append a Memorandum of Understanding to the Westbard plan that requires the County and/or developers to commit funding toward construction of important plan elements at stages during development--for example at every 250 dwelling units or every 100,000 square feet of retail. These funds would go toward non-motorized transit improvements,

daylighting of the Willett Branch, changing River Road to a boulevard and providing green space.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on behalf of our residents.

Attachment: Petition on Affordable Housing

To: Mayor Slavin and Members of the Somerset Town Council
Subject: Somerset testimony regarding Affordable Housing - Westbard Sector Plan Public Hearing, September 24, 2015
Date: September 20, 2015

In both the oral and written testimony to be presented by Town of Somerset officials at the hearing on the *Westbard Sector Plan Public Hearing - Draft* on September 24, 2015, the residents listed below strongly urge you to include a statement that:

Some town residents strongly support plans to include affordable housing in the revised Westbard Sector Plan.

Further, we wish that our support for affordable housing be indicated in any future oral or written communications representing the opinion of the Town of Somerset on the revised Westbard Sector Plan.

Thank you for your consideration.

NAME	ADDRESS
Gail Schwantz	4822 Dorset Avenue
Deale Freeman	4708 Dorset Avenue
Dan Alban	4694 "
Jean Weiss	4710 Essex Avenue
Marian Schaner	4913 Falstone Ave
Cynthia F. Alban	4604 Dorset Ave
Arqueta Nakonec	4905 Cumberland Ave.
Rich. Frank	4507 Cumberland Ave.
John Frank	4507 Cumberland ave

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NAME	ADDRESS
Janet Lowenthal	5807 Deal Pl
James Pines	5807 Deal Pl
Jeanette Kreiser	4702 Falstone Ave
A. Robert Greya	4702 FALSTONE DR.
Dawn Walders	4709 ESSEX AVE
Amy Walden	" " "
Hal Edm	4900 ESSEX Ave
Mark K Edson	5802 Sunny St.
Mark Edson	5808 Sunny St

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NAME	ADDRESS
Dolores de la Torre Bortney	5405 Surrey St.
Phyllis Wrisenfelder	4812 Cumberland Ave
Jay Engelberg	4813 Swanthorne
Elizabeth C. Cleum	501 Trent St.
David Stern	5806 Warwick Place
Esther Finkelstein	5527 Sunny St
Lucinda C. Marmion	4921 Cumberland Ave, Pt. St. 00803

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NAME	ADDRESS
Tommy B. Matthews	5523 Trent St.
Barbara K. Marshall Stone	5523 Trent St.
Samuel Osborn	5519 Trent St
Gregory Munn	5575 Trent St
D. Burr & Superija Burr	5511 Trent St.
Doretha	5507 Trent St
Terna Sprague	5508 Trent St.
Julie Abrams	5514 Trent Street
Erin Veiga Martta	5516 Trent Street.

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NAME

ADDRESS

Tom & Colleen

5578 Laurel Street

Sharon Cohen

11 - 1 - 11

Andy R. Arkin

5520 Trent St