



Montgomery County Group

Testimony in support of Forest Glen/Montgomery Hills Sector Plan

May 30, 2019

The Sierra Club Montgomery County Group strongly endorses the proposed Forest Glen/Montgomery Hills Sector Plan and its recommendations because they embody smart growth principles and propose reasonable and appropriate measures that would encourage safe and sustainable transportation, improve land use, protect the environment, and create a range of housing opportunities and choices.

The current Georgia Avenue corridor in the sector plan area is an unattractive, auto-dominated environment that is unsafe for drivers, pedestrians and bicyclists, and it is a congested mess for commuters and residents alike. Significant improvements are needed and the proposed sector plan and its recommendations would provide the needed changes. What follows is a listing of some of the recommendations contained in the proposed sector plan that we consider particularly noteworthy.

Encourage safe and sustainable transportation

The strong emphasis on vision zero to improve the safety for all individuals including drivers, transit users, bicyclists and pedestrians is especially important. Equally important is balancing traffic demands and proposed infrastructure improvements with the need to enable public transit and safe walking and biking, which are affordable and cleaner alternatives to driving. The sector plan would follow recommendations of the county's Bicycle Master Plan and also establish a bicycle and pedestrian priority area (BPPA) plan for the area.

Improve land use

Much needed transit-oriented development would be enabled by changing zoning to allow high and medium density, multi-unit residential development around the Forest Glen Metro Station, and commercial residential, and mixed use development at both the Metro Station and at the planned transit stop at Georgia Avenue and Seminary for the future Georgia Avenue South Bus Rapid Transit line. Such zoning would encourage redevelopment of large commercial sites and parking lots near transit and result in more pedestrian-oriented environments with walkable blocks with street level amenities that residents want. The recommended zoning revisions are sensitive to the scale and character of existing single family homes, and would provide appropriate transition to multifamily dwellings.

Protect the environment

The proposed sector plan would be good for the environment in a number of ways. It would improve stormwater management, improve open space and existing parkland, expand green cover, and prioritize tree planting along existing and proposed streets. It would reduce local energy demand and consumption by supporting the construction of energy-efficient buildings, and lessen vehicle emissions by reducing traffic congestion and, as previously mentioned, encouraging more use of public transit, biking and walking. The proposed sector plan also would require overhead wires be buried underground which would eliminate unsightly utility wires and poles and avoid conflict with the tree canopy.

Create a range of housing choices

The proposed sector plan would preserve existing market-rate affordable housing, where possible, and encourage county collaboration with non-profit county and private organizations to expand, enhance and develop affordable housing opportunities accessible by mass transit. It also would require MPDUs in new multifamily residential buildings near transit or activity centers, and preserve existing residential neighborhoods of detached homes in and around the sector plan area.

In summary, the proposed Forest Glen/Montgomery Hills Sector Plan and its recommendations are well thought out, embody smart growth principles, are responsive to local community wishes, and deserve your support.

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Chair, Sierra Club Maryland