

Sierra Club testimony to MoCo Council

On Veirs Mill Corridor Master Plan

February 7, 2019

Good evening! I'm Tina Slater, Transportation Chair of the MoCo group of Sierra Club, standing in for our Chair, Dave Sears, who is unable to attend this rescheduled hearing.

Overall, we are pleased and impressed with the current draft of this important plan.

Sierra Club's starting point in our review of such plans is – How will this plan help to address Climate Change? – which is the number one environmental issue facing our community and our planet.

In MoCo, one important way to address climate change is to work hard to give residents and workers more and better opportunities to get where they want and need to go without getting in the car and driving. This plan is consistent with that approach. The stated transportation goals (page 31) are commendable – “a safe, efficient and comfortable complete street that serves pedestrians, bicyclists, transit users and motorists.”

We applaud the focus on improving pedestrian and bicycling infrastructure.

We urge the Council to bring BRT to Veirs Mill Road as quickly as possible. And be sure that BRT includes dedicated lanes – without dedicated lanes, the R (for Rapid) is false advertising. A truly rapid BRT is the core of this plan; without BRT, the rest of the plan falls apart.

We know that this corridor is a state highway; and thus the State Highway Administration will need to be a willing partner in several aspects of plan implementation. Please let Sierra Club know where you think we could be helpful in urging SHA to do the right things to ensure plan success.

A second important way that MoCo can address climate change is to take full advantage of transit stations as locations for mixed use, mixed income, attractive, high density neighborhoods. Here we think the plan is too timid. Don't get us wrong – we are not suggesting that the BRT stop at the corner of Veirs Mill and Randolph should have Bethesda-level densities. But we do think it's imperative that the county take full advantage of our investment in a shiny new BRT by providing many more BRT customers who can easily walk to the BRT stations. These higher density neighborhoods at each of the corridor's six BRT stations will also make great locations for affordable housing (MPDUs, ADUs and other) – enabling many lower income families to have access to first rate transit.

And speaking of housing – we applaud the plan's emphasis on the preservation of existing market-rate affordable housing.

In all, this is a good plan. We think it could be made even better with a stronger push for higher density neighborhoods within walking distance of each of the six new BRT stations.

And I repeat – a truly rapid BRT is the core of this plan. Let's get the Veirs Mill BRT designed and in place as quickly as possible. And let's be sure that it's running in dedicated lanes, so that it's truly rapid.

Contact info – davidwsears@aol.com or slater.tina@gmail.com