

"Federation Corner" column  
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### **Gaithersburg West plan a monstrosity**

by Arnold Gordon, President of Norbeck Meadows Civic Association, and MCCF Transportation Committee Chair and Immediate Past President

The proposed Master Plan for Gaithersburg West as presented by the Planning Board to our County Council is just too darn big. The enormous size of what is contemplated here, and its impact on a large portion of the county, dwarfs any demonstrated or imaginable need for jobs or housing now or even far into the future. It would destroy an already fragile environment, drown the surrounding communities in a sea of construction and development for decades to come, and serve only the purpose of opening a large area of the County for private development producing great profits for its exponents and misery for every one else.

Let me focus on one aspect alone--the public facilities, including transportation, which will be necessitated as a result of this project.

The demand on the area's arterial and secondary roads from the proposed 40,000 new jobs and 20 million square feet of commercial space cannot be imposed on any community, especially one with such a paucity of public transport. The size of this Plan will necessitate a widening of I-270 to a minimum of 16 lanes of traffic, the funding for which does not and will not exist. The transportation grid including the proposed Corridor Cities Transitway (CCT), which will be unfunded for many years to come, requires as its ultimate connection point for riders coming from, and going to, points as far away as Frederick County or even Pennsylvania, the Toonerville Trolley known as the Metro Red Line. This line is already over capacity. It will require an express track costing many billions of dollars to construct, and more billions to improve the stations along the line, to accommodate development proposed in the Gaithersburg West Plan, plus the 11,000 dwelling units contemplated at White Flint and the increasing density at every other Metro station along the route. The Red Line becomes another element of gridlock.

The inadequate capacity of the Metro Red Line, and the inability of the CCT to carry passengers to the Shady Grove terminus with any reasonable timeliness, will induce more auto traffic. Route 28 and I-370, which carry cross county traffic, will be overwhelmed. And the back ups to Germantown and beyond that now occur on a daily basis on I-270 and MD355 will seem pleasant compared to what will result from the Gaithersburg West Plan. And the circuitous routing of the CCT that is proposed through the Plan area will lengthen the trip time for all commuters coming from north of the area, inducing more auto traffic.

In a joint letter to the County Council dated September 15, the Maryland Department of Transportation, State Highway Administration and Maryland Transit Administration all advised against this Plan. In their letter they recommend rejection of the Plan for its extent, timing, and staging. They declare the Plan premature, as it assumes transportation facilities that cannot be provided in the foreseeable future. And they claim traffic to be generated by the Plan has been underestimated and transit ridership overestimated, and it would result in a devastating increase to traffic congestion.

Assuming the total of dwelling units in the proposed Plan, the County must also be prepared to provide, at a minimum, the following public facilities: another elementary school; another high school; at least one additional fully staffed and equipped police station; at least one additional fully staffed and equipped fire station; and, another bridge on the Potomac for the traffic flowing west from Sam Eig Highway through local roads toward a Beltway crossing that funnels down to four lanes on the American Legion Bridge. And I think the folks from the neighborhoods surrounding the Plan boundaries all the way down through

Potomac will enjoy being locked in their communities due to increased traffic preventing smooth ingress and egress. I think you get the picture

As evidenced by past practice, the highest portion of the burden of expense for all of this will be borne by our property taxes and certainly not by the developers and businesses that will profit from it.

Now, let's talk about the need for all of this. Do we need more employment here? The figures show our unemployment rate is very low even given the economic downturn. Nothing in this "Science City" Plan requires that development be for businesses oriented toward the biosciences, technology or the like, except for the Johns Hopkins portion. What would be created is a gigantic office park in an era when commercial space is already adequate for years to come. Put this where it belongs--in Baltimore, where there is a genuine need for employment. One wonders why Johns Hopkins has become so enamored of this County at the expense of its native city. Could race be a factor at play here?

The fiction that Gaithersburg West would be a place of employment for high wage earners just does not reflect reality. Most workers commuting to and from this facility will be paid low to minimally average salaries as lab workers, manufacturing employees, and office workers, not the scientists, doctors and professionals that the term "Science City" evokes in people's imagination. The median price for housing in the area will be beyond the reach of most of these workers, and this will serve to increase commuter traffic into and out of the area.

Lastly, what employer wants to transplant his business and his employees to a gridlocked community with inadequate public facilities and an antediluvian transit system, when in the modern age of computers and the internet that business can be located anywhere and still network with the other businesses and stakeholders it needs to succeed? Would it seek to be in a community where the quality of life is deteriorating and it is choking to death on its own traffic?

We hope the Council will put this Plan where it belongs...in the Planning Department's waste basket.

*The views expressed in this column do not necessarily reflect formal positions adopted by the Federation. To submit an 800-1000 word column for consideration, send as an email attachment to [theelms518@earthlink.net](mailto:theelms518@earthlink.net)*