

CCCFH Talking points for River Road-Westbard Sector Plan Development

(These talking points are taken from the October 9, 2014 CCCFH presentations to the Planning Dept. staff, the Catholic University Study and residents' suggestions)

The overarching goal is that the River Road-Westbard sector plan specifies community-oriented development that serves the needs of the surrounding neighborhoods. Guiding principles are:

Residential housing and retail buildings should be low-density, e.g., town houses and low-rise buildings.

- Development along River Road and Westbard Avenue should be low rise to avoid turning the roads into a canyon of high-rise buildings. Low rise development would maintain and be compatible with the community's neighborhood character.
- Townhouses could provide a buffer between the Kenwood Place Condominiums and retail development.
- Mixed use development is appropriate, e.g., both retail and housing, either separately or with retail on the first floor with 2-3 floors of apartments above.

Any new residential development must have minimal impact on local public school enrollment. (This section focuses on the BCC cluster. The Whitman cluster has similar issues)

- There is concern over the ability of the Montgomery County Public Schools to project enrollment. It may be that their method does not count development until there is a site plan which is too late for providing space for children.
- In this area, it is likely that MCPS estimates for how many children multi-family units, which is based on a county-wide average, generate is too low.
- As of today, Somerset Elementary has 568 students, up from 370 in the fall of 2007. That is an increase of more than 50% in 7 years. Full capacity is 516 and the school is at 568.
- Somerset Elementary has 5 kindergarten classes this fall, something that has never happened in 23 years.
- There is not a single classroom available at Somerset Elementary; music class is being held in the teacher lounge.
- Westland Middle School has 1,312 students. Capacity is 1,097.
- B-CC High School has 1,950 students – projected to reach 2,038 in 2016. Capacity is 1,692.

Development plans must curtail any increases in traffic congestion, cut-thru traffic and also improve pedestrian and bicyclist safety.

- Streetscape on River Road could be improved by giving the intersections of Ridgefield and River and Little Falls and River gateway features such as changed pavement and raised centers and having a raised median strip between the intersections.
- Sidewalks on River Road and Westbard Avenues should be separated from the street with a grass buffer, similar to that by McDonald's, to encourage pedestrians and create a visually pleasant atmosphere.
- Additional bike lanes should be added and where that is not possible sidewalks need to be wide enough to accommodate pedestrians and bikes.
- Additional traffic lights should be added, for example at Landy Lane and the Capital Crescent Trail. Traffic lights for the area should start beginning at Goldsboro Lane and include every intersection where there is a bus stop.
- Crosswalks should be clearly marked.
- Speed for vehicular traffic on River Road should be reduced, and the reduction should occur at an earlier point when driving into the Westbard area from the west.
- Added retail and added housing will likely increase traffic on nearby residential streets so traffic calming measures such as turn restrictions, dense and close-in tree canopy, multiple (and well-marked) crosswalks, speed humps/bumps, on street parking and other visual cues may need to curtail cut-thru traffic.
- Westbard Avenue should remain four lanes in each direction during rush hour (from 6:30a.m.- 10a.m. and from 4p.m. - 6:30p.m.). At other times on-street parking could be allowed.
- Because other nearby developments, e.g., Downtown Bethesda Sector Plan and building of the Intelligence Community Campus on Sangamore, will generate additional traffic in our area, traffic studies undertaken for the River Road-Westbard sector plan should include a wide enough area to capture the potential effects of these developments as well as development in the River Road-Westbard area.

Commercial development must focus on retail services for surrounding communities.

- A revised retail business mix seems appropriate and improvements could be made to the shopping center where the Giant is located.
- Neighbors would appreciate the addition of restaurants that families could be comfortable at. Cafes with outdoor seating and a bakery/restaurant like Pralines at the Sangamore shopping center would be welcome additions.
- Stores, other than a supermarket, should be limited to less than 10,000 square feet. The objective is to have a mix of stores and restaurants that serve neighborhood needs

and not make Westbard a destination shopping center with large national chain stores serving as anchors.

- Neighbors like their current local stores, like the pet store, toy store, barbershop, frame store, hair dresser and dry cleaners, and want them to be able to stay and continue to provide services. Some nearby developments have not been able to maintain shops that serve the neighborhood perhaps because of poor location or too high rents.
- On Westbard Avenue, loading docks should be moved from facing the roadway to a less visible interior location.
- Neighbors prefer ground level parking but this could be accommodated with a smaller scale than the current ground level parking in the shopping center.

Plans should include significant public amenities including generous green spaces and improved access to the Capital Crescent Trail.

- Pocket parks with benches on the interior of the shopping center should provide green space in the new development.
- The interior of the development should have a public plaza for gathering of neighbors.
- Public amenities such as ball fields and/or a community center should be considered in development.
- Trees should be part of the new development both on the interior and along the major roadways of Westbard Avenue and River Road and in a proposed median on River Road.
- A water feature could be an attractive addition.

All new development should improve the environment by using pervious surfaces, green areas that offset hardscape and other measures that improve water quality in the Little Falls Watershed.

- In order to sustain beautification and environmental improvements made along River Road and Westbard Avenue, an urban district similar to the Bethesda Urban Partnership, but with more limited scope, should be developed.
- Reduce impervious surface from current 57%, including replacement of the large parking lot near Rite-Aid with some green space.
- Reduce stormwater runoff with stream restoration instead of concrete channels.
- Increase forest, especially trees, and other natural vegetation, which currently covers only 16% of the land area.
- Improve the Willett Branch portion of the Little Falls watershed, as envisioned in the 1982 sector plan, which included stricter controls over pollution from various sources.

