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TOWN OF SOMERSET

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Rich Charnovich
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Testimony on Westbard Plan
Marnie Shaul, Council Vice-President, Town of Somerset
Read by Mayor Jeffrey Z. Slavin

President Floreen and Members of the County Council,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on behalf of Somerset. Our Council voted unanimously to support this statement, and I am reading it for Council Vice-President Shaul, who is out of the country today.

Somerset supports the vision presented in the Westbard plan, especially neighborhood scale development, biking on tree-lined streets, a restored Willett Branch, and affordable housing.

However, we oppose the Westbard plan itself because it has **too much development—both commercial and residential.**

(The table below is based on numbers from the Planning Department and shows potentially huge increases.)

	Existing	Currently Allowed	Concept Plan (12/17/15 Draft)	Maximum Plan Allows
Residential Units	1104	1684	3584	5049
Commercial	390,237	722,524	720,800	1,502,459
Industrial	667,573	1,372,585	462,000	462,000

A top concern is **school overcrowding**. Our schools are already at capacity. The student projections we have seen are very discouraging, and we have not even seen student numbers for the maximum buildout scenario.

Another concern is **traffic**, especially through our neighborhoods. The Draft Plan says that traffic projections meet standards but we have seen no traffic projections under the maximum buildout scenario. Even for traffic to meet standards in the Draft Plan, investments must be made in bikeways and transit.

For both of these critical issues, we are asking that the County Council include **staging**—having periodic checkpoints to be sure that the growth in students and traffic is being matched with necessary infrastructure.

“Where People and Trees Have Deep Roots and Grow Strong”

If the planners are right, development can continue as planned, but if not, neighborhoods must have some degree of protection.

Three minutes doesn't allow me to touch on all the topics of interest to us so I will highlight several other key issues for Somerset. The 10-acre Washington Episcopal School site (WES) is currently zoned residential but is proposed to have both commercial and residential. **The proposed commercial zoning would allow a mall larger than Congressional Plaza to be built close to single family homes.** (See attached graph for size of development proposed.) Somerset's boundaries are on the WES side of Little Falls Parkway, so we are very concerned about a retail mall at our borders. Somerset wants only residential zoning on this site and recommends that the County have right of first refusal if this property should ever come on the market so that it could be used for a public purpose.

Somerset wants **River Road to be a safer place for pedestrians and bikers** and for it to be visually attractive. We support the plan's concept of a boulevard.

Somerset supports the **naturalization of the Willett Branch as a key public amenity** and we support the regional park, especially with space for a dog park. We want the Civic Green and Springfield neighborhood parks but they need to be **at least ½ acre** to provide a realistic public amenity.

The 1982 Westbard Plan had some of the same vision as this plan but neither public nor private funds were available to make the vision happen. More than 30 years later, there is a chance for major improvements but it will need public as well as private funds. **We recommend that the County Council put funds in its Capital Improvements Program (CIP) to finance bikeways, to purchase parkland, and to make River Road a safe and attractive boulevard.**

WESTBARD PLAN - WES SCHOOL SITE - DEVELOPMENT POTENTIAL (10 ACRES) (Square Feet)

■ WES School ■ Commercial ■ Residential



WES School Existing

Plan Development if All Commercial

Plan Development if All Residential