



## **E-mail note to local Councilmembers & County Executive concerning proposed Costco filling station in Wheaton**

**Sent on April 8, 2010 by the Board of *Friends of Sligo Creek***

Thank you for your past support to protect Sligo Creek from environmental assault. The Friends of Sligo Creek and many residents in the watershed are quite concerned about the implications of excusing the proposed Costco gas station from a full environmental review. We very much want to know how that is justified.

As I suspect you are aware, the Wheaton commercial area is a major source of run-off water that flows to Sligo Creek by way of Wheaton Branch. After the Plaza was originally developed the pollution was so bad that the large retention ponds near Dennis Ave were built to capture trash, silt, and chemicals. They have been effective and the waters of Sligo Creek are better for them. However, gasoline and oil spills and leaks are still a great threat to our creek. Fortunately, we have had only minor problems so far. But the potential threat from a really large station such as the 16-bay one proposed, could do enormous harm to the waterway if not very carefully conceived and constructed. A thorough environmental impact study is the historically wise way to see that that occurs.

We look forward to a forthright explanation of how the County intends to see that Sligo Creek will continue to be protected to at least today's standards. In addition, while the whole Costco project is at initial stages, we are eager to hear what LID and other stormwater protection measures (e.g., green roof) can be anticipated to provide even greater mitigation from Wheaton Plaza stormwater.

### **E-mail Reply from Councilmember George Leventhal**

**Sent on April 9, 2010**

Thank you for your message. I enjoyed hearing your testimony before the County Council yesterday and I appreciate knowing your opinion on the proposed Costco gas station.

Economic Development Director Steve Silverman negotiated with Westfield a grant of \$4 million from the county's Economic Development Fund which will leverage a \$58 million construction project, providing 475 permanent jobs and 250 to 300 construction jobs. Because I believe that Costco would be a popular and likely successful addition to Westfield Wheaton Shopping Mall, I indicated my support for this grant. Mr. Silverman also negotiated that the proposed Costco gas station would not have to go through the special exception process. This process is required under the zoning law for certain land uses and requires the Board of Appeals to take testimony from neighbors in support of, or in opposition to, the proposed use. It can create delays of one to two years and Westfield and Costco did not want to undergo these delays or the uncertainty of whether the special exception would ultimately be approved or denied by the Board of Appeals.

Waiving the special exception requirement for gas stations in a C-2 zone requires the passage of legislation (Zoning Text Amendment 10-04), which was introduced by the Council President at the request of the County Executive on March 16. I have not made a decision as to how I will vote on the legislation. It is important to point out that the legislation would not exempt gas stations from environmental requirements. Environmental controls for gas stations are regulated by the State of Maryland, not by Montgomery County. No environmental impact statement is required for a gas station. Whether or not the proposed Costco gas

station is required to go through the Board of Appeals, it would still be subject to state environmental regulations, Forest Conservation Act requirements and stormwater management rules.

This legislation will be the subject of a public hearing at the County Council on April 20 at 7:30 p.m. If you would like to testify, call Jackie Hawksford at 240-777-7803