

Montgomery County Council Members

August 10, 2023

Dear Council Members:

As you are aware, the Montgomery County Planning Department is in the process of preparing an amendment to the Takoma Park Master Plan (Minor Master Plan Amendment or MMPA). If the development contemplated by this plan is implemented, it will be the most significant construction project in the history of Takoma Park. Overall, the MMPA envisions the construction over some 2 million square feet including 3,500 housing units that could accommodate 7,000 to 9,000 people. While the need for housing in Takoma Park and Montgomery County is uncontested, one essential element that has been omitted from the Draft MMPA is the potential impact on climate change. Both the County and City have committed to a future of net-zero greenhouse gas emissions in addition to climate change adaptation and resilience. Decision-makers need to be able to balance housing requirements against environmental impacts and the process should be transparent and open to public involvement. As a concerned resident and environmental professional, it is unclear whether any of these important goals can be met given the scope of the MMPA development and whether this balance can occur.

An essential element of the MMPA is the redevelopment of the property currently occupied by seven vacant buildings of the former Washington Adventist Hospital. These buildings occupy a footprint of over one-quarter million square feet. Several of them are multi-story. Most of the remainder of this site is occupied by hardscape including parking structures. The site is adjacent to Sligo Creek and the Sligo Stream Valley Park. Redevelopment of this site would be a multi-year (possibly multi-decade) project involving demolition of the existing structures; disposal of the demolished materials; installation and/or reconfiguration of infrastructure including roadways, water, sewerage, electricity, and broadband; site preparation; importation of construction materials; building construction; occupancy; and operation and maintenance. Each of these activities will result in the emission of greenhouse gases including, but not limited to, carbon dioxide and methane. In addition, these activities have a high potential to impact the climate resilience of Sligo Creek

The draft MMPA document acknowledged the potential for climate impact and promised a climate assessment that would be available in June or July 2023, prior to the MNCPPC public hearing currently scheduled for September 14<sup>th</sup>. Unfortunately this promise has not been fulfilled and Planning Department staff now states that the assessment, which necessarily will be a complex technical document, will not be available to the public until late Fall 2023, well after the period for public comment has ended. In addition, the current model used by the Planning Department appears to not account for climate impacts of demolition and construction activities, but only carbon

embodied in materials and structures after construction, as if backhoes, generators, cranes, trucks, bulldozers, and other equipment will not produce emissions. There will be no draft assessment for review by members of the public, nongovernmental environmental organizations, or independent technical experts. County Council will be compelled to review and render a decision on this MMPA without any public input regarding climate change impacts. The wrong decision could result in a failure by both County and City to meet net-zero objectives and subject residents and the natural environment to unmitigated impacts of climate change.

I am asking the County Council to intervene in this process and instruct the Planning Department to open the climate assessment to the public in a fully transparent fashion consistent with the Maryland Public Information and Open Meetings acts. Further, I am asking the Council to hold a work session and public hearing on the climate assessment before its deliberations on the MMPA as a whole.

I greatly appreciate your attention to this matter,

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cc: Takoma Park City Council

Montgomery County Executive

Maryland D20 Delegation