



Friends of Sligo Creek
P. O. Box 11572
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December 19, 2023

Artie Harris, Chair
Montgomery County Planning Board
2425 Reddie Drive, 14th Floor
Wheaton, MD 20902
MCP-Chair@mnccppc-mc.org

Dear Chair Harris:

I am writing on behalf of the Board of Directors of the Friends of Sligo Creek (FOSC) to express our opposition to the Forest Conservation Plan (FCP) submitted to the Planning Department as part of the developer's application for the site at 9801 Georgia Avenue (M-NCPPC File Number F20240040). While FOSC generally supports dense residential development near public transit, it need not force the county to destroy valuable green infrastructure at the same time.

The site at 9801 Georgia Avenue currently features a 1.25-acre woodland that the FCP would cut down in its entirety, 55 trees (plus shrubs and wildflowers) to be replaced by a narrow buffer with sidewalk and 12 planted young trees between the building's north edge and neighboring homes (Sketch Plan, p. 14). We argue that the woodland should be preserved (and improved by removal of invasive trees and vines) so that the county can honor its laudable public commitment to addressing the global climate crisis. An aerial photo of the site, showing the woodland, is inserted at right.



Figure 1: 9801 Georgia Avenue Sketch Plan No. 320230020
(Montgomery Planning, 3/20/2023)

We are aware that the developer is working with staff at the Planning Department to significantly revise their initial proposal for the site, including the Forest Conservation Plan. We look forward to reviewing the new plan upon completion.

The 2020 Sector Plan governing this site calls for **“increased biodiversity and habitat protections, including improved tree canopy”** (3.1.7 Forest Glen Medical Center, pp. 74-75). These priorities fully mesh with the county’s 2021 Climate Action Plan (CAP) and its public commitment to “enhance the wide array of benefits” from **“nature-based solutions, including forest, meadow, and wetland ecosystems, greenspaces, and trees.”** The CAP commits the county to “work across sectors and integrate nature-based solutions [to] support and implement policies and strategies for land conservation [and] **retain, increase, and restore terrestrial ecosystems including forests, meadows, wetlands, green spaces, and urban trees**” (CAP, p. xvii).

Unfortunately, the Sector Plan confuses its intentions by also stating that the developer should be given “maximum flexibility . . . for providing an area of equal environmental benefit” to the woodland. Given the proposed hardscape footprint of the development, there is no space even remotely close to that necessary to provide “equal environmental benefit” elsewhere on the site. In addition to its 55 trees, the woodland also supports a generous shrub layer; a ground layer of wildflowers, grasses, and ferns; and deep woodland soil, none of which can be replicated by planting. The FCP therefore clearly fails to prioritize the “increased biodiversity and habitat protections” stipulated by the Sector Plan.

The veracity of the developer’s original FCP is further compromised by the multitude of errors it contains with regard to the nature of the woodland itself, which should cause the county to doubt all aspects of the FCP: (1) It describes the woodland as encompassing only a third of its actual size (0.43 acres compared to the 1.25 acres stated in the county’s Sector Plan, a size easily confirmed using Google Maps); (2) it mis-identifies all of the Japanese Pagoda trees as Yoshino Cherries; (3) it lists a large elm as Slippery Elm (a species that does not grow naturally in the Sligo watershed) when it is an American Elm, an identification obvious from the bark, even in winter; (4) it lists for removal a significant Tulip-tree citing that it is endangered by vines, when it is actually free of any vines; (5) it lists the proliferating vines on the site as native Eastern Poison Ivy when most of them are invasive Winterberry; and (6) it justifies the removal of significant Black Locust trees on the basis that they are “dead” or “1/2 dead,” which ignores the tremendous value of older trees to wildlife, such as cavity nesting woodpeckers, chickadees, and titmice, and mammals like opossums and squirrels, as well as insects and the birds that eat them.

Adjustments to the developer’s plan would allow the woodland to be preserved. The north-south footprint of the building can be reduced and therefore (a) reducing the number of housing units or (b) raising the building height to maintain the same occupancy level. The former solution

would have the added benefit of lowering the local traffic impact of the development, a major concern of the neighborhood.

For all these reasons, Friends of Sligo Creek urges the Planning Board to reject the current Forest Conservation Plan as inimicable to the Sector Plan's clear priority for enhancing habitat quality and forest cover and the CAP's visionary commitment to nature-based solutions to the climate crisis.

Sincerely,

Elaine Lamirande

President

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cc: Matthew Folden (Montgomery Planning Department)
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