



March 7, 2024

Testimony to the Montgomery County Planning Board

Re: 9801 Georgia Avenue
Silver Spring
Preliminary Plan: 120230160
Site Plan: 820230130
Forest Conservation Plan: F20240040

By: Kit Gage
Advocacy Director
Friends of Sligo Creek

The forest at 9801 Georgia has seen better days, so why save it? Despite jumping through regulatory hoops, it's clear the developer and possibly Planning have decided it's not worth the bother. We disagree: that forest, remarkably, is still functional as a forest in many ways:

It has some big and substantially healthy trees despite serious euonymous vines wrapped around. Some of the dead or dying trees are home to woodpeckers (and worms and bugs that baby birds require to live). There are other birds and animals that are supported in that biome.

Despite not being a full forest, that 1.25 acres at 9801 Georgia currently can function to produce oxygen, sequester carbon, keep the surrounding area cooler, and amazingly, it probably still does a good job capturing and absorbing stormwater – better than any big building site.

I'm sad when I look at that forest. Probably it was once healthy in an increasingly dense and polluted area. Certainly it again could be made healthy with some serious effort. Instead, people have failed it and abandoned it.

But even with the forest in this degraded state, it's nearly impossible that a big new building, taking up almost all of the forest space, can provide the "equal environmental benefit" that Planning requires as a condition of development of the site.

What are the stated and legal priorities around protecting forests? The county (and indeed the country) has prioritized addressing climate change. The county has mandated no net forest loss in the face of continuing loss of tree canopy. We have a new Forest Conservation law. Finally,

the county has prioritized environmental protections for this part of the county for its relatively less affluent and more densely settled population.

Despite these laws and priorities, this area of the county, and in particular this focused area, has lost a huge amount of percentage of forest canopy – from 41% to 25% from 2008 to 2018 (using county figures). It may be worse today, even before cutting down this forest area.

Not until developers, planners, county government and all the people in the county really take their forests seriously, will we start from the beginning of any planned change saying: FIRST: How can we save this forest, and if we must build, build around it and enjoy, appreciate and save it.

It would be remarkable if people did that today, here. And that's what we request, despite being far along in the process. But at the very least today, people must recognize there are lots of folks who understand why and how forests must be preserved and will stand up for them.

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