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VIA: Regular Mail and Electronic Mail - piera.weiss@mncppc-mc.org

Ms. Piera Weiss
Acting Team Leader
Montgomery County Department of Planning
8787 Georgia Avenue
Silver Spring, MD 20910

Re: White Flint Sector Plan – Nicholson Court Properties

Dear Ms. Weiss

We write regarding the approximately 15 acres of land surrounding Nicholson Court in the White Flint Sector Plan study area. We ask that you recommend rezoning this property from its current I-4 zoning to an appropriate mixed use zone, with an FAR of at least 2.5. We also ask that you identify Nicholson Court as the best location for a future White Flint MARC station.

Mixed Use Zoning

Nicholson Court is one-half mile from the White Flint metro station. The land today is dominated by a strip shopping center, one and two-story office buildings, a large self-storage facility and several light industrial uses. The new White Flint that you and the community are designing will be marked by excellent urban design, a superior pedestrian realm, and active streetscapes. The Nicholson Court property can and should contribute to that future vision by redeveloping as a mixed use project. However, with I-4 zoning, it will not redevelop. Nor will it contribute positively to the new White Flint. It will become an anachronism at best, and a blight at worst.

Rezoned to TMX or a comparable mixed use zone, the property will have the ability to redevelop in conjunction with the many other exciting projects proposed along Nicholson Lane and on the White Flint Mall property. Our vision is a well-designed project that may include residential, technology and artisan trades. The look and feel could be similar to Rockville Town Center, which includes retail, residential, technology and arts uses, all contained within 5-story stick construction. In keeping with the philosophy of form-based planning, we would discourage the Board from specifying the amount of residential, retail

or office in the master plan, leaving that decision to the market and the preliminary/site plan process. As other property owners have told the Board, the FAR must be high enough to motivate redevelopment. Existing businesses with existing leases will not redevelop without the proper incentive. In our case we believe the right number is 2.5, less than the FAR requested for the adjacent Combined Properties site.

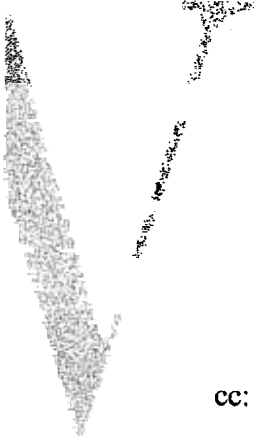
Mixed use zoning is desirable for this property whether or not the future MARC station is located at Nicholson Court. The property is a short walk to the White Flint metro and adjacent to the Fitzgerald, Combined Properties and White Flint Mall sites, all of which will become pedestrian-oriented mixed use sites. This pedestrian realm should be extended to Nicholson Court. If it is not, an important redevelopment opportunity will be lost, and the gritty character of the current uses will conflict sharply with the new community.

A Nicholson Court MARC Station

Although the property should be rezoned with or without a MARC station, we fully support location of a new MARC station at Nicholson Court. The Nicholson Court MARC site is superior to Old Georgetown Road for three reasons. First, our site creates a new, southern transit hub for White Flint, rather than concentrating the transit facilities to the north. Transit is the life-blood of great urban development, and both areas of White Flint need the infusion. Second, the Nicholson Court location is convenient to the thousands of residents living in Randolph Hills and Garrett Park Estates. Not only will they use the MARC station, but the pedestrian crossing that a MARC station provides will allow residents of these neighborhoods to walk to shops and restaurants throughout White Flint. Third, the Nicholson Court property owners' support for the station will increase the likelihood of actually getting a MARC station built.

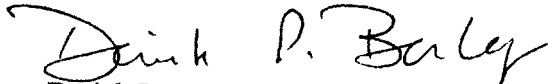
Industrial Uses vs. Smart Growth

We know there is resistance to diminishing the supply of industrially-zoned land. We would like to address that concern head on. As important as industrial land may be, there is one land resource in Montgomery County that is even more precious: land within walking distance of a metro station. The public interest will best be served by making this land available to support the kind of urban mixed-use development that represents the County's future in metro and MARC-served locations. Even today, Nicholson Court is not a logical place for industrial uses. As a result, less than half the land is actually being used for industrial purposes. The bulk of the property is used for retail, office, self-storage and the like. The question is not whether Nicholson Court will serve industrial activities. In the long run, it surely will not. The question is whether it will become a positive element of the new White Flint or remain a dreary backwater.



Thank you for taking the time to consider our views.

Very truly yours,


Derick P. Berlage

cc: Margaret Rifkin – *via electronic mail*
Nkosi Yearwood – *via electronic mail*
Dan Hardy – *via electronic mail*
Glenn Kreger – *via electronic mail*