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BELWARD COMMUNITY WORKSHOP

Discussion Comments
December 9, 2008

The following is a brief summary of the handwritten notes taken by the JHU consultant team during the community meeting held on December 9, 2008. The notes attempt to reflect the factual scope of items discussed without attempting to reflect every comment or opinion expressed.

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OTHER PARTICIPANTS

Gary Ehrenrich, MC-DOT

DEVELOPMENT (General)

- Based upon the MNCPPC December 2, Community Meeting presentation, JHU introduced the Belward Campus development program being considered by MNCPPC for the 108 acres of land at the Belward Research Campus– from 4.6 million to 6.5 million sf of development, with 13,000 to 17,000 jobs in research, medicine and education. JHU noted that this area is only one part of the greater 700 acre Gaithersburg West Master Plan.
- David McDonough described that JHU is competing globally for the best and the brightest researchers and that the older styled (suburban) dispersed and low density development, as characterized by the Research Triangle in North Carolina (or some older corporate campuses in Montgomery County), has not been shown to be the latest state of the art and most attractive to these scientists, especially the next generation of younger scientists. Instead, a mixed use, pedestrian friendly, higher density, more civic form of development

has been shown to be strongly favored for this type of world class research campus. This type of development has also been shown to be more environmentally friendly as a result of de-emphasizing car use, enhancing public transit, and preserving land through greater vertical (vs. low rise horizontal) development.

- Phasing – the development is estimated by JHU to be completed in three phases of approximately 2 million sf each, over 30 to 40 years, starting from 2010 and expected to be fully built out by years 2040 to 2050.
- The design team proposed that the first phase be located near the existing entrance to the Johns Hopkins Belward Research Campus at Johns Hopkins Drive.

DENSITY, HEIGHTS AND MASSING

- JHU clarified that the density being recommended by MNCPPC (up to 6.5 million sf) is instrumental in achieving the overall science vision as well as the county's overall goals for economic development, transit viability, smart growth and easing traffic congestion in the future.
- Of the approximately 700 acres being considered as part of the county master plan, Belward is only 108 acres. Other parts of the county master plan for Gaithersburg West are being proposed at similar densities to Belward, while some are being developed at lower densities.
- How tall do buildings need to be? Due to the nature of the research and medical facilities (e.g., interstitial floors, HVAC supporting "clean rooms" etc.), floor-to-floor heights may average 15' and could be as high as 18' to 22'. As research is viewed as "a contact sport" there is also a need to maximize the number of research scientists working in close proximity to each other, with common access to expensive research equipment. The NIH campus and the JHU Bayview Campus were brought up as precedents for taller, multi-story science research and medical buildings with significant floor-to-floor heights. Consequently, state of the art research and medicine drives building heights.
- Other precedents discussed included Research Triangle, the NIST Campus, and Centennial Campus.
- The MNCPPC Master Plan proposal provides for building heights up to 120' to 140', JHU has proposed heights taller than this limit.
- Buildings up to 75' in height, the limit under current zoning, are acceptable to most residents, but there was some strong opposition to taller buildings on the Belward site. Other residents, however, saw an opportunity to place buildings within the higher height limit in the south-east portion of the site.
- In general, Research Triangle was considered by JHU to be an outdated low density auto-oriented model, while still at a low density, Centennial Campus was considered to be a more current model of a research campus with more closely clustered buildings.
- JHU clarified that given the time line of development, this facility is being built for future generations and should be built as a sustainable development, with good access to transit infrastructure, and with a mix of uses.
- In general, JHU and the design team proposed that the taller buildings would be located near the south east corner of the site, where existing streets provide access and the transit stop is located. This part of the site is also furthest away from the residential homes that directly abut the campus. Additionally, planted buffers would be proposed along the periphery of the property. The trade-off

between building heights and the depth of the surrounding buffer and open space was discussed.

- JHU presented proposed density and campus massing plans of 4.6 to 6.5 million sf, using Lego blocks on a site plan of the Belward Campus.
- Several community attendees, in consultation with JHU, illustrated two possible alternative options using Lego blocks for the overall placement of buildings on the campus. Photographs of the massing alternatives were recorded. Preliminary calculations indicate that the square footages of the two alternative layouts proposed by the community attendees would equate to approximately 2.5 million – 3.5 million sf of space.
- Many community attendees expressed opposition to the loss of the farm beyond the farmstead historical preserve, forest conservation areas and green buffers already proposed by JHU. Several community members also expressed opposition to the increased building heights and higher densities being proposed for the campus. Community attendees were also concerned that the taller buildings of the development would be visible above the trees from outside the campus. JHU discussed that these lower density development scenarios were too low to support the over-all science vision and make mass transit viable.
- Several community attendees expressed a concern for the traffic congestion that would result from the proposed increase in density on the Belward campus.
- Several community attendees also expressed a strong desire to preserve the vista of open pasture that currently exists on the campus land.

BUFFERS

- A variety of buffer alternatives were modeled by JHU and discussed with the residents.
- A 100’ green buffer was viewed as too small between Mission Hills and the proposed campus development. Residents suggested a buffer width within a range up to 300’ as more appropriate with tree buffers or other use of topography to mask the new development.
- The discussion generally indicated that a buffer width within a range up to 200’ along Muddy Branch Road was considered appropriate, as long as it is well landscaped with trees and berms. Several residents expressed that this buffer should not appear to be a forest –it should appear as a well designed landscape, with amenities such as trails included in it.
- A buffer width with a range up to 100’ along Darnestown Road was discussed as appropriate.
- Evergreen and deciduous trees should be included within the buffers, to ensure tree canopy cover through the year.
- Efforts should be taken to ensure that sight lines to the existing landmark tree be maintained, and that JHU take charge of maintaining the tree. Additionally views to the farmstead should be protected.
- The JHU team clarified that over 30-40 years, trees within the buffer can grow up to 100’ in height. For example, initially planted 3” caliper trees would be 12’ to 14’ tall, and in 10 years will grow up to be about 25’ to 35’ tall, providing a visual buffer to much of the campus development. These same trees could reach 100’ in 30-40 years.

- As part of an overall plan, the stream valleys within the site, which are currently degraded, will need to be restored as an environmental and community asset.
- The design team mentioned that much of the open space and buffers in the campus would be available for use by the community, some community members were concerned with ability to cross roads to access, especially Muddy Branch Road.

TRANSIT

- In response to suggestions that development density should not be driven by the needs of transit, JHU clarified that, as noted above density is being driven by state of the art research and medical facilities. This research driven density also supports the ridership needed for mass transit. It was also noted that development is likely to come to the overall county, and how the county plans for its future infrastructure needs, including roads and transit, is crucial in ensuring that traffic congestion is kept under control. The JHU team pointed out that transit (i.e., the CCT) is a key element in this strategy to reduce traffic congestion, along with greater residential offerings elsewhere within the greater Gaithersburg West Master Plan. By utilizing this "smart growth" approach with more people riding mass transit and more people living where they work and walking or biking to work, fewer people will be in cars leading to less traffic congestion.
- Location of CCT stops – while the proposed re-alignment of the transit route is still preliminary, the location of the CCT stop should be within Phase 1 of the Belward development. A suggested location for the CCT transit stop in Phase 1 was shown on plan graphics. Several residents had no objection with the proposed CCT transit stop in Phase 1, but were concerned the CCT exit route along Muddy Branch Road would make the road too congested. The design team responded that there are several strategies that would mitigate much of the visual and auditory impact of the transit route on Muddy Branch Road, such as partially hiding the route with berms. The community asked to see illustrations of these strategies.
- Several community attendees also expressed concern about the increase in automobile traffic and the LRT/BRT at the intersection of Great Seneca Highway and Muddy Branch Road. The design team mentioned that the light rail might cross the road at a grade separated intersection so that it does not interfere with traffic.
- Alternative CCT routes proposed by residents that avoided direct access to Muddy Branch Road were discussed. The alternatives each have challenges and may not be achievable, but can be further considered as the re-alignment is evaluated by the state and county agencies.
- What kind of CCT system – is this an LRT system or a BRT System? This is subject to further study by the state and county, but this will not be a "heavy rail" system.
- Frequency of CCT service – up to every 6 minutes is being considered for peak travel times, but is still preliminary and will be affected by demand.
- Overall alignment of CCT route – this is still in development, but the general principle to be adhered to is that transit works best when it runs in as direct a manner as possible, and serves nodes of higher density.
- What will be the cost to ride transit? This will be determined in the future.

- CCT Funding alternatives are being studied by the county for transit infrastructure – the state intends to seek federal funds for a portion of the costs.
- Members of the community asked for a visual illustration of the transit configuration at the intersection of Muddy Branch and Key West – who will provide this?
- Members of the community on the west side of Muddy Branch expressed concern about the CCT line backing up to their community, both in terms of noise and safety for their children.

NEXT STEPS

- The County Master Plan process involves the following steps including community input:
  - A public hearing before the Planning Board
  - Two public hearings before the County Council (one before committee, and one before the full council)
- The JHU Team intends to continue to work with the community in order to inform both the Master Planning, and eventually the Site Planning, process. The immediate next steps for the JHU team include:
  - Communicate the results of this meeting to the MNCPPC Staff
  - Hold another meeting with the community after MNCPPC has presented its Plan for Gaithersburg West (MNCPPC scheduled to make such presentation on January 15, 2009). Based upon this MNCPPC schedule, the next community meeting was tentatively proposed for mid to late January, At this next meeting, JHU will present refined development options for the Belward site incorporating comments from the community