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MONTGOMERY COUNTY COUNCIL

ROCKVILLE, MARYLAND

October 25, 2021

TO: Casey Anderson, Chair, Montgomery County Planning Board

FROM: Councilmember Hans Riemer

SUBJECT: NDC's site plan application at Takoma Junction

I am writing to express my concerns regarding the delays in approving the Neighborhood Development Company's site plan to build new retail space in Takoma Park. As a Takoma Park resident and a Montgomery County Councilmember At-large, I support the project and encourage the Montgomery County Planning Board's full approval. My own observations and conversations with Takoma Park residents tell me that this project is very popular and that many residents are bewildered about the current state of affairs.

There are, as you know, some opponents to the project who claim NDC's plan threatens the well-known Takoma Silver Spring Food Co-op adjacent to the site. But the project does not threaten the Co-op. Rather, NDC will provide additional parking and other accommodations for the Co-op's future functioning; the proposed lay-by being the most important. NDC needs the Co-op to succeed because it will serve as a valuable "anchor" to the whole block. In return, the new shops and eateries will bring new customers to the Co-op. The Co-op officially does not oppose the project.

The primary hold-up at this point comes from the State Highway Administration (SHA) regarding the proposed layby for truck deliveries. The layby, which will be carved out of the site the NDC leases, will chiefly serve the Co-op's daily deliveries. Thus, it is critical to the Co-op.

Nevertheless, the SHA has persisted in opposing the proposed layby even though it lies outside the existing right-of-way. The SHA's objections are familiar to you, so I won't elaborate.

If there is an alternative approach that is better than a lay-by, great. If not, we should move forward with what we have. I urge you to press SHA to treat this site no differently than it would treat any other similar development. While I know that the project has attracted some prominent critics, including our own Comptroller Peter Franchot and Montgomery County Executive Marc Elrich, the simple fact is that it is a modest scale development that East West Highway can easily absorb. I am writing because I hope that the Planning Board can get a fair and reasonable outcome for the property owner (the City) and the residents of the area.

I think it's important for the County to support quality in-fill development in our older communities, and traffic engineering standards need to accommodate creative development, exemplified in NDC's project. Denying this project will lead to lose-lose outcomes for all the parties involved. Denial will send a bad signal to the region's development community that our County and especially Takoma Park does not support sensible in-fill development. The upside is the transformation of a moribund parking lot into two levels of new shops and small offices, a nice boost to the tax base and property values, and a lot of new wage-earners jobs.

I hope and expect that the Planning Board and SHA will do as it often does: work together with the developer to mitigate problems and optimize efficient deliveries, pedestrian safety and smooth traffic flow. We need not stymie a sensible project and the City's exciting vision for the Takoma Junction area.

Sincerely,



Hans Riemer
Chair, Planning, Housing & Economic Development Committee

CC: County Councilmembers
Takoma Park City Councilmembers
Marc Elrich, County Executive, Montgomery County
Kate Stewart, Mayor, Takoma Park
Greg Slater, Secretary, Maryland Department of Transportation
Christopher Conklin, Director, Montgomery County Department of Transportation