

Montgomery County Planning Department

Preliminary and Site Plan Review Ashton Meeting Place Case # 120050060 and 820070100

Executive Summary June 18, 2007

A hearing on a previous version of the subject Preliminary Plan and Site Plan was held on April 12, 2007. At that time the Planning Board took testimony from the Applicant, Development Review Staff, and numerous concerned citizens.

Original Application

At this hearing, the Applicant provided an overview of the development, including propose resolution to several important issues known to be of concern to Staff and local citizens. Important aspects of their proposal were:

- Proposed density of 0.49 FAR versus the allowed maximum of 0.75 FAR.
- Environmental mitigation proffers for stream-valley and wetland buffer encroachments.
- Architectural details that would create a sense of identity for the Ashton Village Center, while providing a connection to existing historic buildings in Sandy Spring.
- Design elements negotiated with local citizens, including a green on the corner and active storefronts and parallel parking along MD 108; and
- Site details, landscaping, and internal sidewalks to stimulate pedestrian traffic within the site.

Public Testimony

Of the thirty-six local citizens who spoke at the hearing, seven were in support of the project as presented by the Applicant, one was neither in favor of the project nor against it (but interested in State Highway Administration (SHA) improvements to adjacent sidewalks), and twenty-eight were opposed to the project. The most typical reasons for support voiced at the hearing were that the project would alleviate traffic congestion (through the SHA improvements), provide necessary community services and employment opportunities, provide a sense of character for Ashton, and that the proposal was designed according to the vision of the Master Plan. In contrast, the most typical reasons voiced in opposition to the project were that the proposed development was too large in scale given the rural conext, was environmentally insensitive, and was too conspicuous, would exacerbate traffic congestion, was not in conformance with the Master Plan, and would generally create a small-town or rural village experience.

Original Staff Recommendation

In the Memorandum to the Planning Board dated March 3, 2007 (Appendix A), Staff presented its case for denial based on five issues.

- Non-compliance with Section 59-C-18.18 of the Zoning Ordinance: parking for C-1 uses in the adjacent residential zones;
- Non-compliance with Section 59-C-4.2: parking garage in the C-1 zone;
- Non-conformance with the design guidelines of the Master Plan and incompatibility with all of the Master Plan recommendations;
- Inadequate safety and inefficiency of the locations of buildings, structures, and pedestrian and vehicular circulation systems; and
- Inadequate protection of environmentally sensitive areas.

Revised Staff Analysis and Recommendations

The current Preliminary Plan and Site Plan submissions fail to adequately address the first four of these five concerns and compel Staff to maintain the recommendation of Denial. To further analyze the most important points of this case and address specific questions about the recommended scale and character of development on the subject site the following staff report is presented in five sections:

- 1) Analysis of the Applicant's proposal.
- 2) Re-analysis of parking requirements on the subject land.
- 3) Analysis of the Sandy Spring/Ashton Master Plan design guidelines and recommendations.
- 4) Analysis of the Sandy-Spring Rural Village Overlay Zone.
- 5) Recommendations for the subject property based on staff analysis of the master plan and overlay zone.

Appendices

- A. Original Memorandum, dated March 30, 2007, from Staff to the Planning Board
- B. Zoning Ordinance Citations
- C. Excerpts from the Sandy Spring/Ashton Master Plan
- D. Letter from David Brown analyzing the subject site parking restrictions
- E. Applicant's correspondence countersigned by DPS
- F. Memorandum from Environmental Planning Staff