

4 February 2010

Good Evening

My name is Virginia Sheard and I am speaking tonight on behalf of the Coalition of Kensington Communities. The CKC is a unified body of area civic associations with the goal of enhancing the quality of life in the Kensington area.

Representatives from the CKC began discussing revision of the Kensington Sector Plan with Planning staff well before Fred officially began the process.

We generally support the draft presented here, recognizing that some redevelopment and growth will happen and that mixed use is a desirable concept. The quality of life that this Plan will encourage will depend on recommendations being scaled to the footprint and transportation arteries to ensure that the existing community is not overrun or disconnected from the future developments.

There are however, several areas of concern that should be addressed, augmented, or enhanced before this committee sends it on to the full Council.

- While the environment discussion is well researched, documented and presented, the transportation discussion fails to address cumulative impact of the planned increased traffic at our major intersection of Connecticut and Knowles Avenues and offer realistic solutions detailing how pedestrians will be able to walk/bike from Kensington Parkway, old town, and the planned new 'town center' on the Burka site or the Arts and Crafts District.

A conventional view of a 'town center' is dedicated space where people congregate, interact, enjoy scheduled activities and events, and the like. Where is this town center defined or described in this draft? What makes this parcel the 'town center'?

- Another area of concern is the lack of a commitment to providing a community center or enhanced recreational facilities as the population increases. It is briefly mentioned in discussion of the HOC location at the former Kensington Elementary School. However, CKC strongly urges you to add specific language that will dedicate part of this site for a community/recreation center. Should HOC relocate and the site become available, it is the best (and only) parcel for a center for indoor classes and activities as well as an enhanced playground/outdoor activity space. With a potential population growth of 500-1000 residents at build-out, there will be a need for this type of facility within safe walking distance of the new residences. Yes, Beach Drive is not far and the KenGar Rec Center nearby but neither provide a facility for year round scheduling of indoor/outdoor activities or classes.
- The proposed CR zoning on four prime parcels would encourage the mix use concept but without well crafted design standards, specifying those elements of each parcel that will create unique destinations for different kinds of activities and retail shops. Without some definition of each of these areas, redevelopment could result in clones of the first site to redevelop. What will create distinct character to promote linkages and encourage people to circulate among them? Will a project be just another mixed use block that could just as well be out on Route 29? What is recommended for these parcels if the CR zoning is not approved in a timely fashion? Of particular concern is the ratio of commercial to residential development on the individual sites and how they would work together to create a sense of place.

Design standards should be an integral part of the approved Sector Plan. As active stakeholders in the Sector Plan process, CKC is disappointed that Planning staff is apparently developing these guidelines and we have not been included in this process. I also understand that a decision has been made that Design Standards should not be part of an approved new Sector Plan, although the reasoning is obscure. If that is the case, these standards should be available to you now as you review this document so that you can understand how the language and intent of the Plan will be implemented by the Standards. To have the Standards as a separate document that can be changed at will by the Planning Department anytime in the future perhaps without public input and not approved by the Council, defeats the goal of having a Plan that creates certain predictable expectations over the life of the Plan. For instance, mid-block breaks should be required to prevent large monolithic structures. Green roofs and walls are part of good design if a developer wants to attract tenants, but add little to the quality of the experience of the pedestrian and certainly should not be exchanged for added density. Linked pedestrian paths to green pocket parks or other public spaces between the sites should be a minimum standard not an optional bargaining chip.

- We are well aware that transportation is a big issue in all areas of the county and it is equally the big elephant in the room in Kensington. We are bisected by Connecticut Avenue which separates the existing 'town center' in the older section and the proposed new 'town center' on the other side. Mention was made of reduced traffic speeds but there is little other discussion of managing traffic to create a pedestrian friendly community and encourage non-auto mobility around the whole Sector Plan area. What can realistically be achieved to address this problem? Kensington is seriously congested now and will be adversely impacted by the BRAC job increases and proposed residential and commercial commuters proposed in the White Flint Plan – each adding more drivers using Cedar Lane and Knowles Avenue to get across county. The capacity of these major roads cannot be significantly increased – therefore what traffic management concepts are needed to address this issue and how much detail should be in this Sector Plan to ensure that this is adequately addressed over time?

- Safe pedestrian mobility plans and linkages.
- Appropriate scaling of development to create unique destination areas that are interconnected
- Community and Recreational facilities.
- Traffic and mobility capacities and management tools, and
- The Design Standards to ensure implementation of the goals and intents of this Plan.

These are our concerns.

The CKC does not have the answers but strongly encourage you to challenge the Planners to address these concerns to create the lively, diverse, and unique urban design Kensington of the future. Storage lockers and bike racks are not substitutes for sustainable solutions.

Respectfully submitted,

Virginia Sheard, for the Coalition of Kensington Communities.

3303 Geiger Avenue, Kensington, MD 20895 301-949-3372 [boots3303@aol.com](mailto:boots3303@aol.com)