

Special Committee on the Bethesda Downtown Plan
Wednesday, March 8, 2017
7:00 pm, Leland Center

Attendees: Cecily Baskir, Tina Coplan, Dedun Ingram, Karen Elkins, Debra Vollmer, Steve Seidel, Jean Shorett, Mary Flynn, and Mona Sarfaty

1. The minutes from the February 9, 2017 Committee meeting were approved without changes.

2. Updates on recent PHED committee worksessions: Cecily and others who attended recent PHED committee worksessions summarized discussions to date. With regard to the Jaffee property, the idea of limiting height to 90 feet has support from some PHED members and some Council members, but George Leventhal favors more height, and Nancy Floreen has expressed interest in linking the final approved height to contributions for parks. Also of note, Barney and Cecily had another meeting with representatives from St. John's Church. With regard to PHED discussions on park space in Bethesda, the subcommittee appears to recognize the demand for park space, but is concerned about financing and about the demand for parking space. Mary pointed out the existence of a web site sponsored by the Montgomery County Planning Department that solicits input from County residents about their usage of existing parks, and allows input concerning how often people visit any park on the map and what amenities people would like to see added.

Committee members also asked about the recent University of Maryland traffic study, which was presented to the Town recently. Glenn Orlin of the Montgomery County Council staff has asked for additional analyses and is interested in reconciling discrepancies between the University of Maryland study and the analyses performed by the County Planning Department. However, the PHED response to traffic issues appears to favor changes to roads such as widening lanes instead of attempting to constrain development.

3. Update on CBAR activities: Four more neighborhoods (including Chevy Chase Section 5, Martin's Addition, and the Hamlet) have signed on to CBAR's major letter regarding the BDP. Many volunteers have helped circulate CBAR's petition regarding converting 4 Bethesda area parking lots to parks, which now has about 1400 signatures on paper copies and about 700 on-line signatures. The petition will be open for 2 more weekends before being presented to the Council, probably prior to the last PHED worksession on March 27.

4. Discussion of status of bicycling plans in BDP: In light of competing priorities, the committee discussed whether and how to push for improvements to bicycling plans, which remain weak. The lack of contiguous bike routes remains highly problematic. Although Hans Reimer and Roger Berliner are verbally supportive of improvements for cyclists, improvements have not resulted. Tina and others previously drafted 8 specific requests, and several people have sent this list to Council members privately. The committee agreed to encourage individuals to contact Council members about bike-related issues, possible

using the 8 point list as a template, and the Town will continue to press the points with Mr. Reimer in particular.

5. Other updates and discussions: With regard to issues with school overcrowding, reportedly Roger Berliner has stated in other public meetings that the Montgomery County school system has agreed to re-examine their projections and models for school enrollment. However, any results from this effort will not be available until November, well after Council action on the BDP.

The committee discussed a survey that would query people how use about Parking Lots 10 and 24 about their patterns of usage and preferences for converting part versus all of the parking lots to park space. After a full discussion, the Committee decided not to pursue this approach. It was suggested that Montgomery County Parks and Planning could be contacted to see if they would be interested in taking this on.

Dedun reported that she and Barney have begun drafting a letter regarding the Town's positions on the Bethesda Overlay Zone (Zoning Text Amendment). Mary suggested that mature drafts be reviewed by the Montgomery County Planning staff for accuracy.

5. Next steps: Volunteers for petition sessions, especially on the next two weekends, should contact Julia Bellinger. Volunteers to help on the overlay zone draft are also welcome.

The meeting was adjourned at 9 PM.