

Testimony by Mayor Barney Rush
Town of Chevy Chase, Maryland
*Public Hearing on Funding Requests for the
Farm Women's Market Redevelopment Project*
November 15, 2022

President Alborno and County Councilmembers,

On behalf of my colleagues and fellow residents, I speak today in favor of the County Council approving two funding requests which will complete the financial plan for creating two new urban parks in Bethesda. The development of these parks will accompany the refurbishment and expansion of the Farm Women's Market. Collectively, these projects will create an exciting series of amenities for greater Bethesda, enhancing the quality of life for residents, workers, and visitors, and augmenting tax revenue. It will also demonstrate the County's commitment to environmental stewardship, creating one of the largest green roofs in the region. Pavement will be replaced with grass, canopy trees, walkways and play areas.

The vision for these parks arose six years ago, during citizen review of the Bethesda Downtown Plan. Thousands of residents from greater Bethesda came together and signed a petition calling for more urban parks. We agreed that Bethesda could and should support additional density -- and it has. But we also believed that this additional density had to be matched by additional open space. We identified the 4 surface parking lots -- two in East Bethesda and the two near the Farm Women's Market -- as the most practical means of securing this vision. Our vision is your vision: The need for exactly such additional open space has been highlighted in the "Thrive" County master plan that this Council has just approved.

Now is the time to turn this vision into reality. The developers, The Bernstein Management Corporation and EYA, have developed an approved sketch plan that is enthusiastically endorsed by the communities. A new underground garage would replace most of the existing surface parking, and approximately three acres of new urban parkland would be created. The developers are now ready to truly launch the project.

But the predicate for this is a credible financial plan. Of the nearly \$28 million required, the developers are committing \$8 million, most of which is to purchase the density required for one of their new buildings. The State of Maryland is committing \$3.5 million. And the Town of Chevy Chase is committing \$4.5 million. We are pleased to make this contribution to a project outside of our Town, for the greater good of greater Bethesda.

We now ask for the County Council to demonstrate its commitment by providing the remaining funding required. The \$2.5 million proposed from the Parks Department's funds will come from Park Impact Payment receipts -- which is money from developers in Bethesda, and which must be spent on parks in Bethesda. The County is being asked for \$9.225 million from general

resources, a balanced request representing 1/3rd of the total required for these parks. It is a vital amount for this Public-Private Partnership, and important that the commitment be made now.

I want to close by expressing our thanks to so many who have helped this project to this critical juncture: The developers who have shown tenacity and creativity; the County partners who have worked so long for this project, including the DOT led by Chris Conklin and the Parks Department led by Mike Riley; County Executive Elrich, who has supported this project and backed the communities in their effort to ensure the parks will be of substantial size; the Planning Board and former Chair Casey Anderson, who put in place the innovative Park Impact Payment mechanism; and to three members of this body: Councilmember Friedson, who has been a staunch champion; and also to two Councilmembers who sat as colleagues 6 years ago: former Councilmember Roger Berliner, and you, Councilmember Riemer. Your leadership led the Council to make the critical change in the language of the Bethesda Downtown Plan that called for the creation of these parks. This change provided the sightlines for our vision.

Thank you, all.