



April 17, 2009

MEMORANDUM

TO: Montgomery County Planning Board
VIA: Glenn Kreger, Acting Chief, Vision Division *GK*
Sue Edwards, Team Leader, North Central Transit Corridor, Vision Division
FROM: *NS* Nancy Sturgeon, Planner Coordinator, Vision Division (301-495-1308)
SUBJECT: Public Hearing Draft Gaithersburg West Master Plan: Planning Board
Worksession #1 – Life Sciences Center (LSC) Overview and Transportation

STAFF RECOMMENDATION: Review Transportation Analysis and Recommendations and the Land Use/Transportation Balance. Review recommendations for potential park acquisition in the Quince Orchard area.

I. SCHEDULE FOR FUTURE WORKSESSIONS

The current Planning Board worksession dates for the Gaithersburg West Master Plan are:

Worksession #2	May 14, 2009	Environmental Analysis, Corridor Cities Transitway (CCT), Transportation Elements, Life Sciences Center (LSC) Districts, LSC Zone, LSC Design Guidelines
Worksession #3	May 18, 2009	Continuation of Issues from Worksession #2
Worksession #4	May 28, 2009	Economic Analysis, Implementation, and Staging
Worksession #5	June 11, 2009	Continuation of Implementation and Staging

II. PUBLIC HEARING TESTIMONY

The Public Hearing for the Gaithersburg West Master Plan was held on Thursday, March 26, 2009. Over 100 people attended the hearing in the Planning Board auditorium and 57 people presented testimony. The hearing record was open until April 10 for additional written testimony to be entered into the record. A table summarizing all of the oral and written testimony is provided as Attachment E. All written correspondence received while the public hearing record was open is available for review at the Planning Department and has been posted on the Gaithersburg West Master Plan webpage (www.montgomeryplanning.org/community/gaithersburg/index.shtm). In general, comments corresponded to concerns of residents, commercial property owners and biotech businesses, and other interested parties.

III. MASTER PLAN VISION FOR THE LIFE SCIENCES CENTER

The Gaithersburg West Master Plan envisions a future Life Sciences Center (LSC) with an enhanced role as the County's premier life sciences location. Transforming today's suburban, auto-oriented LSC into tomorrow's walkable, vibrant science center requires changing the built environment, the pattern of development, and the mix of uses over time.

The Plan's vision for the LSC builds on the strong foundation of existing institutions and businesses, and the County's land use plan that brought together health services, academia, and research and development companies. Today, the LSC has the largest concentration of, and is the premier location for, research and biotechnology companies in the County.

The future viability of the LSC requires the following components:

- opportunities for growth and expansion of existing enterprises
- a dynamic environment that will attract skilled workers and investment
- infrastructure and services to support future development
- staging development to balance growth and minimize adverse impacts
- sustainable practices that provide a "quality of place."

This Plan establishes a blueprint for the LSC that includes an expanded, first-class medical center, research facilities, academic institutions, and an array of services and amenities for residents, workers, and visitors. It will have an open space system that integrates the area's natural environmental features into a larger network, connecting destinations by paths and trails, and providing opportunities for a range of outdoor experiences. The Plan also recommends sites for new housing to provide workers the opportunity to live near their jobs.

The LSC of the future will be served by a fully-integrated transit system that links mid-County activity centers via the Corridor Cities Transitway (CCT). A strong public and private commitment to the Plan's transit proposals will help ensure that the LSC is connected internally as well as to the rest of the Corridor. Access to high quality transit is increasingly important to businesses trying to attract knowledge-based, creative class workers. Transit is an essential element of this Plan and is the basis for the land use and zoning recommendations. The overall land use concept is based on concentrating density and height at the three proposed CCT stations in the LSC while effectively maintaining existing zoning capacity elsewhere (primarily in LSC North and LSC South). Without the relocated CCT stations, the Plan-recommended densities in the LSC area would result in the Plan being out of balance from a land use/transportation perspective. Worksession #2 will include an overview and discussion of the recommendations for the LSC Districts, including a zoning text amendment for the Life Sciences Center Zone to expand the densities and range of uses.

IV. TRANSPORTATION

Worksession #1 for the draft Gaithersburg West Master Plan will provide an overview of Transportation issues. The memorandum from Transportation staff is Attachment F and the Transportation Appendix is Attachment J. Transportation issues that are summarized in the attached memo and that will be covered in this worksession include the following:

- Overall balance between land use and transportation
- Overview of key transportation-related recommendations in the Master Plan
- Transportation aspects of the proposed Staging plan

Overview of Transportation Issues Raised in Testimony

Concerns about traffic congestion were raised by residents, some of whom are organized in two groups – the Residents for Reasonable Development and the Gaithersburg-North Potomac-Rockville Coalition. Both groups are concerned that the area is already congested and stated that additional development will overwhelm the system and cause considerable problems. While there is concern about the traffic that would be generated by the overall amounts of density proposed by the Plan, the Belward property has been a keen focus. In their testimony, residents note that Belward is adjacent to one of the most congested intersections in the County, Great Seneca Highway and Muddy Branch Road.

Members of the two groups are opposed to the Plan's proposed grade-separated interchanges, which are recommended for five intersections in the LSC vicinity (and two intersections outside the LSC) to support development of the maximum potential densities over the next 30-40 years. Residents view interchanges as inconsistent with suburban residential communities and would like the Plan densities to be reduced to levels that do not require this kind of infrastructure. Testimony also questioned assumptions about the potential ridership of the Corridor Cities Transitway (CCT) and stated that the transit should not be used to justify increased density.

The City of Gaithersburg expressed concerns about recommendations for right-of-way increases along major roads. The City stated that there is no room for a grade-separated interchange at Diamondback Drive and Sam Eig Highway and the recommendation should be deleted.

The City of Rockville does not believe that the draft Plan adequately accounts for and manages the negative impacts of new traffic and indicates that there should be a greater focus on how to mitigate these trips. Rockville is concerned about the impact on arterials and secondary roads in and near the municipality as well as the I-270 ramps and potentially I-270.

Several property owners in the Life Sciences Center expressed concern about the Plan's recommendations for new local streets due to potential conflicts with future development. The benefits and importance of the additional local streets are discussed in the attached Transportation memo and the Transportation Appendix. Final alignments for any proposed new streets will be subject to further engineering evaluation at the time of new development or redevelopment. Discussion of Plan recommendations that affect specific properties will be addressed at subsequent worksessions.

Some property owners also expressed concern about the impact of increased right-of-way along Key West Avenue as well as the proposed interchange at the Key West Avenue/Shady Grove Road intersection. Staff will review these issues during Worksession #1.

V. PARK RECOMMENDATION FOR QUINCE ORCHARD AREA

Issue: How does the Plan rectify the shortage of neighborhood parks and active recreation in areas outside the Life Sciences Center?

The Quince Orchard area is the western portion of the Gaithersburg West Master Plan, located adjacent to Seneca Creek State Park and west of Quince Orchard and Longdraft Roads (see Attachment A). The Plan recognizes the need for additional recreation facilities and makes the following recommendations:

The 1985 Gaithersburg Vicinity Master Plan and the 1990 Shady Grove Study Area Master Plan both recommended a 10-acre local park on the Crown Farm, which has since been annexed into the City of Gaithersburg and is no longer available for a County park site. Consideration should be given, but not limited, to two properties in the Quince Orchard area if they become available in the future: the Johnson property at 12311 Darnestown Road and the Smokey Glen Farm property at 16407 Riffle Ford Road. The Johnson family owns the largely vacant R-200 14-acre parcel on Darnestown Road along with the adjacent C-1 commercial property. The Smokey Glen Farm has operated for over 50 years as a private recreation facility providing outdoor events for large groups. Ideally, a new park would provide two rectangular fields for active recreation. (page 43)

- *Address the demands for active recreation in this area by acquiring land for a local public park when a site becomes available. (page 45)*

Johnson Property

The Johnson property is within the Plan boundaries. There is an approved special exception on the 14-acre parcel for a retail/wholesale horticultural nursery and garden center (intended for Johnson's Florist and Garden Center). The Plan recommends continuation of the current land use and zoning; if the property becomes available in the future, consideration should be given to acquiring the property for a local public park.

The Johnson property owners do not object to the recommendation to consider the possibility of obtaining a portion of the property for park uses as long as the Plan language does not convey that the property is limited only to this use or that a portion of the property must be dedicated for a park site through a future subdivision application. (See Attachment B.) The property owner suggested the following additional Plan language:

“If the Johnson property cannot be obtained for a park site through a voluntary purchase and sale agreement, then the Plan recommends single-family attached, detached, and townhouse residential uses, other special exception uses allowed in the R-200 zone, or an expansion of the existing retail/wholesale horticultural nursery and garden center special exception, or a combination thereof.”

Master plans cannot recommend that an approved special exception be expanded nor can the Plan specify whether special exception uses in a zone may be appropriate or allowed. Special exceptions are processed and determined by the County's Board of Appeals, which conducts a thorough review of whether special exception conditions are met.

Staff Recommendation Add the following language to the Plan: *If the Johnson property(zoned R-200) is not acquired as an active recreation park site, the parcel may be appropriate for residential use including single family detached and single family attached units. Townhouse development could be requested through a Local Map Amendment.*

Smokey Glen Farm Property

The Smokey Glen Farm property is adjacent to, but not within, the boundaries of the Gaithersburg West Master Plan. This property was previously included in the 1971 and 1985 Gaithersburg Vicinity Master Plans. During County Council worksessions, the property was added to the 2002 *Potomac Subregion Master Plan* without the opportunity for the Planning Board or staff to assess the property's potential for future parkland.

The Sweet family, owners of Smokey Glen Farm, are strongly opposed to the Plan language and have requested that the reference to their property be removed. They state that the Plan language is detrimental to their business and places a "cloud" over the property by suggesting that the business may not continue. In testimony and other meetings with staff, they state there is no interest in selling the property.

Without a Master Plan recommendation for potential park acquisition, the Commission is unable to use ALARF (Advanced Land Acquisition Revolving Fund) funds. Park staff responded to a letter from the attorney representing the Sweet family (see Attachments C and D) stating:

"Master Plans are the primary venue for designating potential future open spaces and parkland acquisition to meet long term future recreation and preservation needs; it is important that they include all potential acquisition proposals."

"The Master Plan language provides an option to be pursued only by mutually agreeable parties (i.e., a willing seller) and is intended to signal that if, at any point in the future, the property owners would be interested in selling, the Parks Department would be interested in discussing acquisition and would seek independent appraisals to determine fair market value."

Staff Recommendation Consideration should be given, but not limited, to *either of* two properties in the Quince Orchard area if ~~they become available in the future~~ *the property owners are willing to negotiate a sale to the Parks Department for future parks sites:* the Johnson property at 12311 Darnestown Road and the Smokey Glen Farm property at 16407 Riffle Ford Road.

The complete, combined, and revised text recommended by staff for this section is outlined below.

Staff Recommendation for Revised Text The 1985 *Gaithersburg Vicinity Master Plan* and the 1990 *Shady Grove Study Area Master Plan* both recommended a 10-acre local park on the Crown Farm, which has since been annexed into the City of Gaithersburg and is no longer available for a County park site. Ideally, a new park would provide two rectangular fields for active recreation.

Consideration should be given, but not limited, to *either of* two properties in the Quince Orchard area if ~~they become available in the future~~ *the property owners are willing to negotiate a sale to the Parks Department for future parks sites:* the Johnson property at 12311 Darnestown Road and the Smokey Glen Farm property at 16407 Riffle Ford Road.

The Johnson family owns the largely vacant R-200 14-acre parcel on Darnestown Road along with the adjacent C-1 commercial property. *If the Johnson property (zoned R-200) is not acquired as an active recreation park site, the parcel may be appropriate for residential use including single family detached and single family attached units. Townhouse development could be requested through a Local Map Amendment.*

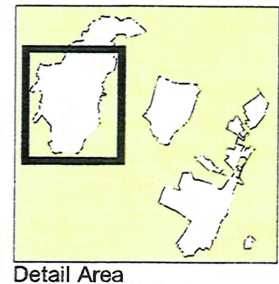
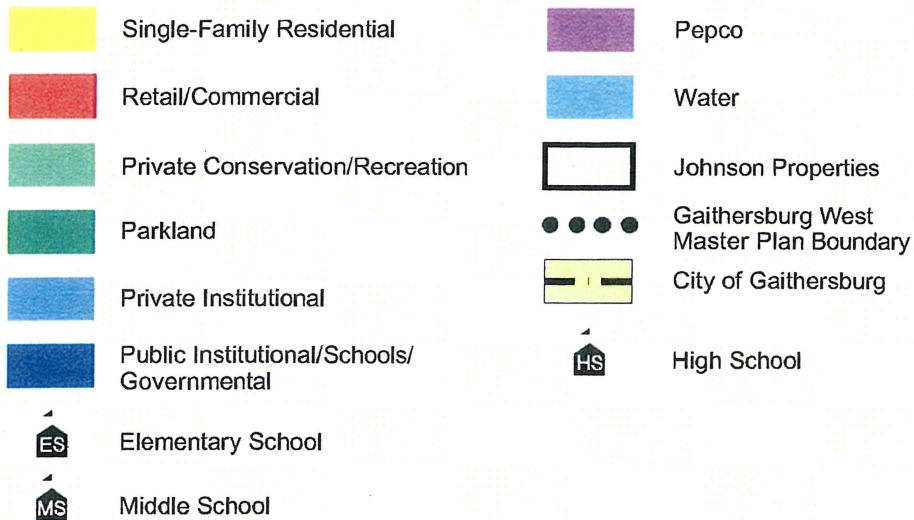
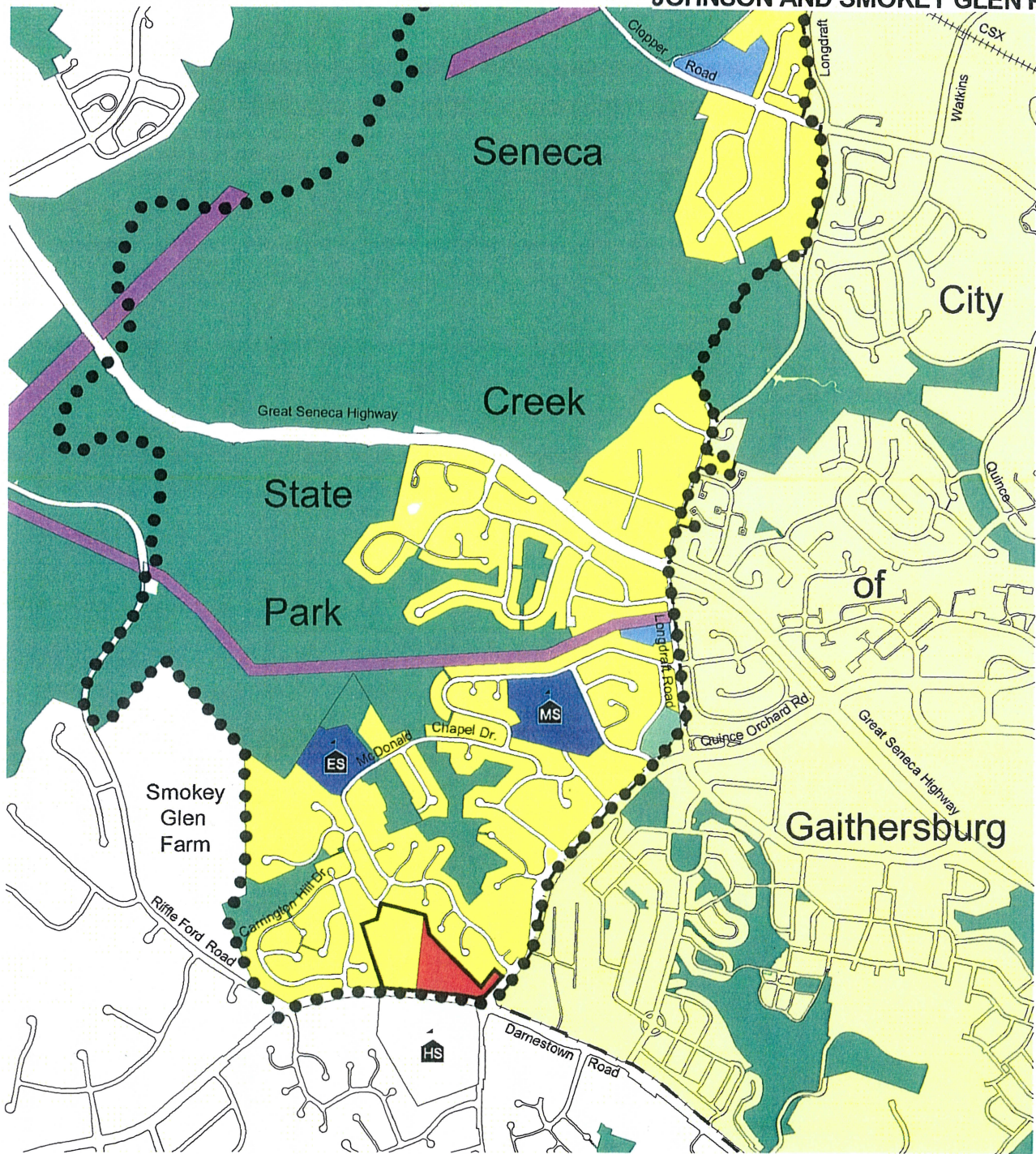
The Smokey Glen Farm has operated for over 50 years as a *significant* private recreation facility providing outdoor events for large groups. *Continuation of this use is beneficial to the community.* (page 43)

- Address the demands for active recreation in this area by acquiring land for a local public park ~~when~~ *if* a site becomes available. (page 45)

Note: New text is shown in red; deleted text is shown with ~~strikethrough~~.

Attachments:

- Attachment A Map of Quince Orchard Area: Johnson and Smokey Glen Properties
- Attachment B Letter to Planning Board members from Russell B. Johnson (April 6, 2009)
- Attachment C Letter to Planning Board members from Anne C. Martin (March 4, 2009)
- Attachment D Letter to Anne C. Martin from Mike Riley (March 24, 2009)
- Attachment E Summary of Gaithersburg West Master Plan Public Hearing Testimony
- Attachment F Transportation Memorandum
- Attachment G Letter to Rollin Stanley from Gregory I. Slater (SHA; April 9, 2009)
- Attachment H Letter to Chairman Hanson from Council President Phil Andrews (March 17, 2009)
- Attachment I Letter to Council President Phil Andrews from Chairman Hanson (March 27, 2009)
- Attachment J Transportation Appendix



ATTACHMENT B

RAYMOND T. JOHNSON, INC.

T/A **JOHNSON'S**
Florist & Garden Centers
BLOOMING SINCE 1933

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April 6, 2009

BY EMAIL

Dr. Royce Hanson
Chairman, Montgomery County Planning Board
8787 Georgia Avenue
Silver Spring, MD 20810

**RE: Gaithersburg West Master Plan – February 2009 Public Hearing Draft
Johnson Family Property – 12311 Darnestown Road, Gaithersburg, MD**

Dear Dr. Hanson and members of the Planning Board:

You may be familiar with my family's company, Johnson's Florist & Garden Centers, which has operated in Montgomery County and Washington, D.C. for over 50 years. We are very proud of our stores, our role in the community, and the numerous awards we have received. My family owns multiple properties in the County including the 14-acre parcel on Darnestown Road that is included in the Gaithersburg West Master Plan planning area (the "Plan"). Our property has an existing special exception approval for a retail/wholesale horticultural nursery and garden center. It is also largely vacant, as the Plan indicates. Page 43 of the February 2009 Public Hearing Draft of the Plan recommends that "consideration should be given" to acquiring 10 acres or more of our property for purposes of a County park site.

We do not object to the recommendation to consider the possibility of obtaining a portion of the property if that means simply encouraging the Parks Department to make a reasonable offer to purchase a portion of our property. If such an offer is not made, or if it is unacceptable, then we do not want the recommendation to be construed as limiting our property to only that use or to suggest that a significant portion of the property must be dedicated for a park site as a part of a future subdivision application.

If acquisition of a portion of our property for a park site is not possible, for whatever reason, then the Plan should recommend other uses on the property such as housing, an expansion of the existing retail/wholesale horticultural nursery and garden center special exception approval, or other permitted or special exception uses consistent with the R-200 zone.

Dr. Royce Hanson
April 6, 2009
Page 2

After the sentence that reads "The Johnson family owns...along with the adjacent C-1 commercial property," we respectfully suggest the addition of the following sentence: "If the Johnson property cannot be obtained for a park site through a voluntary purchase and sale arrangement, then the Plan recommends single-family attached, detached, and townhouse residential uses, other special exception uses allowed in the R-200 zone, or an expansion of the existing retail/wholesale horticultural nursery and garden center special exception, or a combination thereof."

Thank you very much for your consideration.

Respectfully,

Russell B. Johnson

with permission
Stuart R. Barr

Russell B. Johnson
Vice President, Raymond T. Johnson, Inc.
d/b/a Johnson's Florist & Garden Centers

cc: Nancy Sturgeon