

City of Takoma Park

Office of the Mayor

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7500 Maple Avenue
Takoma Park, MD 20912

The Honorable Bruce R. Williams
Mayor

September 27, 2011

Françoise Carrier, Chair
Planning Board
Montgomery County Planning Department
8787 Georgia Ave.
Silver Spring, MD 20910

Subject: Transmittal of City of Takoma Park Resolution No. 2011-52

Dear Ms. Carrier, *Françoise*

On October 6, 2011, the Montgomery County Planning Board will be considering the adoption of the draft Urban Design Guidelines for the Takoma Langley Sector Plan area, prepared by planning staff. The Takoma Park City Council, having an opportunity to review the draft, strongly urges the Planning Board to reject the proposed guidelines. The Council unanimously agrees that the proposed guidelines are overly vague, do not address the interests of the community and do not provide the specificity that developers need to make informed and financially sound investment decisions.

We are extremely concerned that we cannot find "the details" we need to guide new development in our community. They are not in the Commercial Residential Zones; they are not in the Takoma/Langley Crossroads Sector Plan; nor are they in the Urban Design Guidelines. We endorsed the Sector Plan with the belief that these details would materialize.

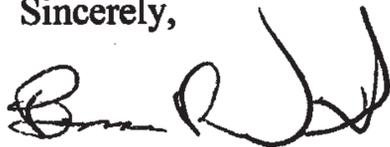
Our concerns are not new and have been conveyed to your staff repeatedly. In May 2011, after substantial outreach to the community impacted by the Sector Plan, the City forwarded specific recommendations for inclusion in the proposed design guidelines. Our recommendations were designed to protect and improve the aesthetic and physical quality of life of residents in adjoining single and multi-family blocks, while encouraging private and public investment in projects that are pedestrian oriented, aesthetically pleasing, and support the comfortable use of alternative modes of transportation. Rather than engaging in a meaningful dialogue with the City and community residents, the planning staff issued successive drafts, each of which has been less responsive to the community's and the City's needs and shared vision.

We requested the adoption of clear and specific baseline expectations so developers and their engineers and architects could easily understand the community's expectations and did not waste time and valuable resources participating in unnecessary and expensive site plan revisions and meetings. Instead, we got design guidelines that are scattered with vague "can," "consider," "could," "strategies include," and "elements include." The Planning Department appears to be intent upon providing generic direction at best and, at worse, offering no guidance. Only once does the word "should" appear, applying only to public use space, a tiny fraction of the overall built environment and the public realm.

More insulting is the failure of the draft Urban Design Guidelines to acknowledge the investments the City and the State have made in infrastructure, site furniture, banners, and public art in the area. The document includes images of Silver Spring improvements as examples, not projects that are actually within the City or the Sector Plan area that we would like to replicate. The document also includes illustrations of buildings that are taller than could be built under the parameters of the Sector Plan. It is clear that the staff writing and editing the document have little familiarity with the plan and less with the City. For example, the document recommends that new buildings look like buildings in adjacent neighborhoods whereas the City and the community have specifically stated that we do not want any existing architecture emulated and have presented recommended materials and designs that are more environmentally friendly and of a higher aesthetic value and quality.

We have, in good faith, attempted to work with the Planning Department to develop design guidelines that reflect our community's interests and values and allow us to support the proposed Takoma Langley Sector Plan. At every attempt, we have been repeatedly told, "we can't." In keeping with this trend, I must convey the City Council's disappointment and inform you that we can't support the draft Urban Design Guidelines. A copy of the Council resolution adopted on September 26 rejecting the Planning Department's proposed Urban Design Guidelines is enclosed.

Sincerely,



Bruce R. Williams
Mayor

/enclosures/

Introduced by: Councilmember Schultz

CITY OF TAKOMA PARK, MARYLAND

RESOLUTION NO. 2011-52

**RECOMMENDING THE PLANNING BOARD NOT APPROVE
THE URBAN DESIGN GUIDELINES FOR THE TAKOMA/LANGLEY SECTOR PLAN
UNTIL THEY ARE CLEAR, SPECIFIC, AND DETAILED**

WHEREAS, the Takoma/Langley Sector Plan is a bi-county plan developed by Montgomery and Prince George's Counties' Planning Departments, to enhance the community character and provide for transit-oriented development around planned transit facilities; and

WHEREAS, the Takoma/Langley Sector Plan recommends increased development; and

WHEREAS, the City Council and the Takoma Park community have reviewed and discussed the plan and its impact on future growth and development of Takoma Park; and

WHEREAS, the Takoma Park City Council supports the development of the New Hampshire Avenue corridor and the Takoma/Langley Crossroads as an urbanized regional center which is environmentally and financially sustainable and enhances the quality of life of area residents; and

WHEREAS, for many years, the City has worked to plan for, coordinate, implement and support design improvements to this area, regardless of jurisdiction; and

WHEREAS, the City has had the expectation that design detail would be forthcoming in the Montgomery County Urban Design Guidelines; and

WHEREAS, the proposed Urban Design Guidelines provides insufficient guidance to developers as they prepare for site plan review and each revision adds to the development costs; and

WHEREAS, each successive version of the Urban Design Guidelines presented by the Planning Department staff is more generic, contains less guidance, and is not specific to our community and the City's vision than the version before it; and

WHEREAS, during the Sector Plan discussion before the Montgomery County Planning Board, its staff provided assurances that detail to implement the vision would be included in the Urban Design Guidelines; and

WHEREAS, the Urban Design Guidelines fail to provide sufficient detail and clarity on design expectations; and

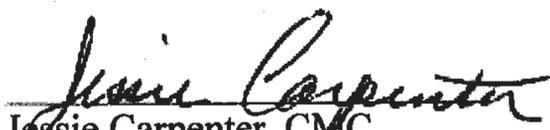
WHEREAS, the Urban Design Guidelines do not reflect a public dialogue with the local community; and

WHEREAS, the Urban Design Guidelines do not reflect the unique qualities of Takoma Park or the City's efforts to revitalize the area, improve pedestrian, and transit friendliness.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the City Council of Takoma Park recommends that the Montgomery County Planning Board not approve or adopt the Takoma/Langley Crossroads Urban Design Guidelines and direct staff to incorporate the City's comments into subsequent drafts (see attachment Exhibit A).

Adopted this 26th day of September, 2011.

ATTEST:


Jessie Carpenter, CMC
City Clerk

Introduced by: Councilmember Schultz

CITY OF TAKOMA PARK, MARYLAND

RESOLUTION NO. 2011-53

**RECOMMENDING THE MONTGOMERY COUNTY COUNCIL NOT APPROVE THE
TAKOMA/LANGLEY SECTOR PLAN UNLESS ADDITIONAL URBAN DESIGN
LANGUAGE IS INCLUDED**

WHEREAS, the Takoma/Langley Sector Plan is a bi-county plan developed by Montgomery and Prince George's Counties' Planning Departments, to enhance the community character and provide for transit-oriented development around planned transit facilities; and

WHEREAS, the Takoma/Langley Sector Plan contains policies, objectives and recommendations that will guide future growth and development around proposed transit facilities in both Montgomery and Prince George's Counties; and

WHEREAS, the City Council and the Takoma Park community have reviewed and discussed the plan and its impact on future growth and development of Takoma Park; and

WHEREAS, the Takoma Park City Council supports the development of the New Hampshire Avenue corridor and the Takoma/Langley Crossroads as an urbanized regional center which is environmentally and financially sustainable and enhances the quality of life of area residents; and

WHEREAS, for many years, the City has worked to plan for, coordinate, implement and support design improvements to this area, regardless of jurisdiction; and

WHEREAS, the City has had the expectation that design detail would be forthcoming in the Urban Design Guidelines; and

WHEREAS, the Montgomery County Council Planning, Housing and Economic Development Committee is recommending that development proposals *address* rather than *be consistent with* the Urban Design Guidelines; and

WHEREAS, the proposed Urban Design Guidelines provides minimal guidance to developers as they prepare for site plan review and each revision, due to poor guidance, adds to the development costs; and

WHEREAS, each successive version of the Urban Design Guidelines presented by the Planning Department staff is more generic, contains less guidance, and is less specific to our community and the City's vision; and

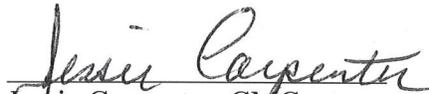
WHEREAS, the community has met, discussed future zoning and design, and elected to embrace the vision espoused by the Sector Plan contingent upon assurances of quality development that improve the overall pedestrian and aesthetic experience; and

WHEREAS, neither the CR Zone nor the Urban Design Guidelines provide these assurances as they lack details and clarity on design expectations.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the City Council of Takoma Park strongly recommends that the Montgomery Council not approve the Takoma/Langley Crossroads Sector Plan until the document has been updated to incorporate amendments contained in Exhibit A in its entirety, except where editorial changes would facilitate improved clarity of the meaning of the recommendation.

Adopted this 26th day of September, 2011.

ATTEST:


Jessie Carpenter, CMC
City Clerk