



THE MARYLAND-NATIONAL CAPITAL PARK AND PLANNING COMMISSION

July 2, 2003

MEMORANDUM – MANDATORY REFERRAL

Student Services Center
Montgomery College, Takoma Park Campus Expansion

TO: Montgomery County Planning Board
VIA: John A. Carter, Chief, Community-Based Planning Division *JAC*
Glenn Kreger, Silver Spring/Takoma Park Team Leader *GK*
FROM: Margaret Rifkin, Planner Coordinator (301/495-4583) *MR*
Community-Based Planning Division

REVIEW TYPE: Mandatory Referral- (Forest Conservation Plan Not Required)
APPLICANT: Montgomery College
CASE NUMBER: 03104-M-1
REVIEW BASIS: Article 28, Chapter 7-112 of the Regional District Act

ZONE: R-60
MASTER PLAN: Takoma Park
FILING DATE: May 14, 2003

STAFF RECOMMENDATION: APPROVAL with comments

COMMENTS:

1. Landscape and Lighting:
 - a. Revise the design for the southern portion of the plaza to discourage mid-block crossings of Fenton Street.
 - b. Enhance the gateway design by using plant materials to visually unify the plaza with the open space at the entry to the ramp on the west side of Fenton Street.
 - c. Maintain cumulative light levels at a minimum of 0.2 footcandles on the sidewalks. Lights along New York Avenue should have full cut-off features. Provide for safety while avoiding light spillage and glare problems for the nearby residences.

2. Coordinate the selection and spacing of light fixtures and street trees for New York Avenue with the Department of Public Works and Transportation (DPWT), the City of Takoma Park, the Historic Preservation Commission staff, and the M-NCPPC staff.
3. Shift bus stop locations to reduce the distance to crosswalks and to the north entrance to the Student Services Center, in coordination with DPWT.
4. Address building coverage for this entire college-owned block at the time of the Facility Plan update for the campus.
5. Other relevant Planning Board comments and conditions from the May 31, 2001, November 1, 2002, and February 6, 2003 reviews still apply, as described in the letters to Montgomery College.

PREVIOUS PLANNING BOARD ACTIONS

Previous Planning Board actions are as follows:

June 8, 2000	Approved Site Selection for the Expansion
May 31, 2001	Approved Phase One (Bridge in Park, Health Sciences Center and Realignment of Fenton Street) and Cultural Arts Center Location in Jesup Blair Park
November 1, 2001	Approved 70% Design for Bridge in Park
February 6, 2003	Approved Revisions to Bridge in Park and new Cultural Arts Center Location
March 31, 2003	Approved Bridge over Fenton Street (administrative review)

OVERVIEW OF COLLEGE EXPANSION

The Montgomery College Expansion project includes the following phases:

- Phase One: Health Sciences Building – under construction; Fenton Street Realignment – complete; and Pedestrian Bridge – under construction
- Phase Two: Student Services Center – subject of this review
- Phase Three: Cultural Arts Center – 2004-2005 review
- Future Phase: King Street Center – 2004-2005 review

The College is updating its Facilities Master Plan to incorporate the former Giant Bakery Site now called the “King Street Center.” The Planning Board will review the Facilities Master Plan later in 2003.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

This mandatory referral addresses Phase Two, the Student Services Center. The project is located at the intersection of Fenton Street and New York Avenue.

The Student Services Center will bring together student services that are currently spread out on the existing campus. These will include: computer science and technology, assessment and testing, admissions and records, career and educational planning, financial aid, the cashier, cafeteria, and bookstore. There will also be offices for faculty, security and student activities.

The proposed building is approximately 100,000 square feet in gross floor area and three stories in height. There will be two street level entrances: one at the north end and one at the south end. They will be joined by an interior atrium that serves as a pedestrian route. A third entrance will lead from the second story to the pedestrian bridge connecting to Jesup Blair Park and the Georgia Avenue campus. This review does not include the bridge span over Fenton Street, which has already been approved.

PLANNING BOARD ISSUES

The main issue is whether or not the design and operating characteristics ensure compatibility with the neighborhood.

COMMUNITY OUTREACH AND COMMUNITY CONCERNS

The College has conducted an extensive public outreach effort. The College created the "Takoma Park Expansion Advisory Team" which includes representatives of nearby neighborhoods. Within the past year, the College has had four meetings with the Team followed by meetings to which the general community has been invited. The College has also met with other interested groups. The College participated in a worksession with the Takoma Park City Council on May 19, 2003.

PROJECT ANALYSIS – FINDINGS

FINDING #1 – The project will be consistent with the Takoma Park Master Plan.

The Takoma Park Master Plan¹ shows this project site for College expansion. It calls for maintaining compatibility with the adjacent residential communities and providing improvements to sidewalks serving the campus. The Plan recommends some public use of the campus and the provision of primarily on-site parking. It recommends that stormwater management controls be provided as new development occurs to mitigate off-site impacts in the surrounding neighborhoods. This project is consistent with these recommendations.

¹ Approved and Adopted December 2000

FINDING #2 – The project will be consistent with the Forest Conservation Law and Environmental Guidelines

There are no forested areas or specimen trees on the site. The project is exempt from providing a Forest Conservation Plan because it is a modification to an existing use. A Tree Save Plan is not required.

FINDING #3 – The project will not be consistent with all the Development Standards for the R-60 Zone for private development, but is consistent with the intent of the zone. As a public use, the Student Services Center is not required to conform to the standards in the zone and is permitted.

The proposed **building height** is 45 feet and three stories. It is five feet over the 40-foot height limit allowed with site plan approval. While exceeding the height limit, the proposed building conforms to the three-story limit allowed with site plan approval. The additional height results from each story being taller than that typical of residential structures. The additional height allows the interior spaces on each floor to meet today's standards for quality academic buildings. The effect on the neighborhood is negligible because the entire third story is stepped back from New York Avenue by at least 15 feet.

The proposed building setbacks from New York Avenue and Fenton Street are 25 feet and are consistent with the standards in the zone.

Building coverage should be addressed in the Facility Plan update. At that time, there will be a concept for the entire block and the combined coverage of all existing and proposed buildings, including the Student Services Center, can be evaluated.

FINDING #4 – The project will be compatible with existing and proposed adjacent uses and structures:

Compatibility will be achieved in terms of height and setbacks as described in the above discussion of development standards. In addition, the facade of the building along New York Avenue is compatible in terms of its actual design. The materials, detailing, window designs and creation of window bays all contribute to compatibility. Two shades of brick are used which relate to those used elsewhere on the campus and in the community. The windows are not large walls of glass, but are more traditional rectangular openings in the brick wall. The windows are divided by mullions to create a more residential scale and to reference traditional window patterns. These design features are the result of extended discussions with the advisory committee and the larger community. Issues such as character and the design's relationship to the nearby Historic District, were taken into account.

The plaza area and northern edge of the building were designed to avoid blocking views from nearby homes. Sun and shade patterns were also taken into account to avoid unnecessary impacts on homes.

Activity and noise will be located away from the New York Avenue residential edge. The more active and noisier uses will be on the Fenton Street side. Quieter offices will be on the New York Avenue side. There will be no building entrances directly on New York Avenue and the main north-south pedestrian route is pulled away from New York Avenue and into the spine of the Student Services Center to reduce student activity on that street.

Mechanical equipment on the roof has been located away from the residential edge and toward Fenton Street to minimize noise impacts on the neighborhood. The cooling towers, which generate noise, have been placed behind other rooftop elements to reduce noise transmission toward the New York Avenue neighborhood. In addition, four smaller cooling towers are being used instead of fewer larger ones, in order to limit noise.

FINDING #5 – The locations of the structure, open space and circulation will be adequate, safe and efficient when the following comments are addressed.

The building location is logical and works well. The site was enlarged by the realignment of Fenton Street and the building sits at a highly visible location central to the expanded campus.

The proposed project accommodates good pedestrian and vehicular circulation. The plaza at the northern tip of the building is located where it serves as both a gateway feature, a gathering place, and an outdoor foyer for the main entrance to the building. The plaza is designed to separate student gathering areas from the through-route for residents who wish to reach Fenton Street, bus stops, the Metropolitan Branch Trail, and the ramp to the bridge to Jesup Blair Park and South Silver Spring. Residents will be able to circulate without passing through the middle of student gathering areas.

To reduce the likelihood of pedestrians crossing Fenton Street mid-block beneath the bridge span itself, revisions should be made to the design of the southern edge of the plaza. (See attached Site Plan/Landscape Plan.) Such revisions should reduce the size of the space so it does not appear to be an inviting arrival/gathering space but rather a smaller passage space from the bus stop to the main entrance. This could be achieved by converting some of the paved plaza to green area, enlarging the existing landscaped edge along Fenton Street.

Bus stop locations should be shifted to reduce the distance to crosswalks and the main entrances to the Student Services Center and to minimize the need for pedestrians to cross the maintenance drive.

Service access is provided by a maintenance drive from Fenton Street and works well. A drop-off area is provided on New York Avenue where it will not interfere with traffic.

FINDING #6 – The proposed project satisfies the Adequate Public Facilities Test for transportation requirements, provided that site access is coordinated with the Montgomery County Department of Public Works and Transportation and the City of Takoma Park.

FINDING #7 – The landscape plan and lighting plan will contribute to the compatibility of the project, sustainable design, and to the success of the gateway/entry with the following minor revisions:

LANDSCAPE PLAN:

The gateway is comprised of the Student Services Center plaza and the open space at the entry to the ramp which face one another across Fenton Street. (See attached Site Plan/Landscape Plan.) The success of this gateway will be enhanced by further coordination. Consideration should be given to using some of the same plant materials in both places to further unify the overall gateway design. This will be particularly effective if attention is given to ensuring unity through the use of plant materials for seasonal interest. For example, the circle in the plaza is shown as either being “lawn” or “seasonal color.” “Seasonal color” is preferable and consideration should be given to using the same plant materials at the ramp entry. The landscape for the Student Services Center should be installed as part of this phase along with any remaining landscaping for the open space at the ramp entry.

The combined plant palette for the Student Services Center and the ramp entry area is composed primarily of native plants. This reflects the college’s responsiveness to the community’s request to use native plants as well as consistency with the recommendation in the Takoma Park Master Plan. The limited number of non-native species that are used are appropriate and provide maximum aesthetic impact in controlled locations. This gateway will be a highly visible example of the successful integration of native plants into an urban setting.

LIGHTING PLAN:

The goal is for cumulative light levels from all fixtures including pedestrian lights, building lights and street lights, to provide for safety while avoiding light spillage and glare problems for the nearby residences.

Several approaches will be taken to accomplish this. Spillage of lighting from within the building will be controlled with window blinds. The spaces that occupy the first and second floor along New York Avenue are offices that will function primarily from 9:00 a.m. until 5:00 p.m. The classrooms on the third floor will be set back from New York Avenue. In order to minimize light spillage, no lighting will be directed up towards the skylight which is located in the center of the building. Some of the measures to prevent light spillage are operational such as lowering blinds if spaces along New York Avenue are used late at night. Should there be problems in the future, the College is encouraged to resolve them using its good lines of communication with the neighbors.

In addition, the lighting plan should be revised to ensure that minimum light levels for sidewalks are 0.2 footcandles and that new lights along New York Avenue have full cut-off features to minimize sky glow.

CONCLUSION

The staff recommends approval to transmit the above comments to Montgomery College.

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ATTACHMENTS:

Location Map
Existing Zoning Map
Site Plan for Entire Expansion Area
Historic District Analysis
Site Plan/Landscape Plan
Aerial Perspective Looking South
Perspective – New York Avenue