



THE MARYLAND-NATIONAL CAPITAL PARK AND PLANNING COMMISSION

September 18, 2003

MEMORANDUM

TO: Montgomery County Planning Board

VIA: John A. Carter, Chief *JAC*
Community-Based Planning Division

FROM: Khalid Afzal, Georgia Avenue Team Leader (301/495-4650) *KA*
Community-Based Planning Division

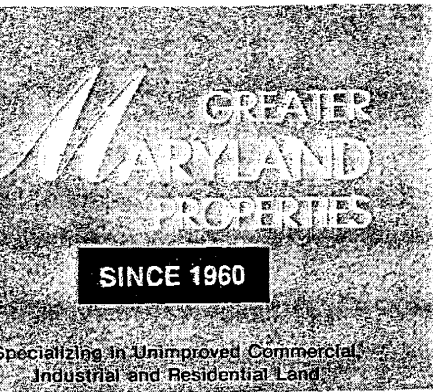
SUBJECT: Public Hearing Draft Olney Master Plan

The Public Hearing Draft of the proposed Olney Master Plan is attached. The Planning Board approved the Staff Draft as the Public Hearing Draft on July 24, 2003, and set September 18, 2003 as the public hearing date.

Since the public hearing was postponed for one week due to Hurricane Isabel, this packet has been revised to include letters and copies of e-mail communication as of Thursday, September 18, 2003.

KA:ha: g:\afzal\public hearing cover.doc
Attachments

#15



SHENANDOAH VALLEY OFFICE, P.O. BOX 390, STRASBURG, VA 22657-0390
 STRASBURG, VA (540) 465-4040 GAITHERSBURG, MD (301) 565-2560

July 16, 2003

RECEIVED
 1042
 JUL 17 2003

Khalid Afzal, Team Leader
 Georgia Avenue Corridor
 COMMUNITY PLANNING DIVISION, MNCPPC
 8787 Georgia Avenue
 Silver Spring, MD 20910-3760

OFFICE OF THE CHAIRMAN
 THE MARYLAND NATIONAL CAPITAL
 PARK AND PLANNING COMMISSION

RE: THE OLNEY MASTER PLAN REVISION AND THE KUPERSMIDT PROPERTY.

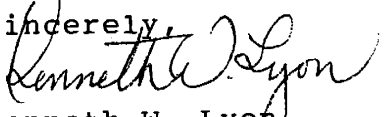
Dear Mr. Afzal:

Please consider this as a sequel to my May 21 letter which demonstrated that at least 12 acres of the above can be sewered by gravity into an existing line on Norbeck Road, taking advantage of infrastructure now in place. I ask that the contents of both letters be considered at your July 24 Planning Board session.

There can be no reasonable logic in denying sewer service to such a few randomly chosen undeveloped parcels in the southeast quadrant of the Olney Plan. If you were to remove the 100 acres of park land (formerly R.E.L. Smith), a cemetery and already developed areas, my point would be very vividly illustrated.

If an objective of the plan is to protect the headwaters of the Northwest Branch, then this entire area should be allowed to have sewer, particularly when it is in the RNC Zone. Failing septic systems in areas already developed will also need sewer in future years which will improve the watershed protection needed.

Improperly included in a sewerable area are six large lots in the Plainfield Orchards Subdivision, each containing 15 to 20 acres, part of an early cluster subdivision agreement with the Planning Commission. This will cause future problems, being pressure to subdivide these lots when they are legally required to be permanent green space. I was directly involved in the subdivision at that particular time.

Sincerely,


Kenneth W. Lyon
 GREATER MARYLAND PROPERTIES
 P.O. Box 390
 Strasburg, VA 22657-0390

(540) 465-4040

cc to: Derick Berlage, Chairman, Planning Board
 John Carter, Chief, Community Based Planning
 Owners of record

Afzal, Khalid

From: Harry Berman [harry@berman.family.name]
Sent: Saturday, August 02, 2003 8:46 PM
To: Afzal, Khalid
Subject: olney master plan update

Importance: High

I have recently been informed that there is a proposal in the update to the Olney Master Plan to build MPDU housing on a tract of land bordered by Bowie Mill Road.

This is a change to the previous draft plan.

Can you please email me a copy of the Public Hearing Draft Plan or provide a link to that plan on the website?

Can you please provide me with a current schedule of public hearings?

Can you please provide me with the information necessary to be put on a list of testifying individuals?

Your prompt attention to this matter would be appreciated.

Thank you,
Harry Berman
Olney, MD

August 7, 2003

Mr. Derrick P. Berlage
Montgomery County Planning Board
M-NCPPC
8787 Georgia Ave.
Silver Spring, MD 20910

RECEIVED
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AUG 07 2003

OFFICE OF THE CHAIRMAN
THE MARYLAND NATIONAL CAPITAL
PARK AND PLANNING COMMISSION

Dear Mr. Berlage:

I think all of us who live on Darnell Drive in Olney were very surprised to see in the recently released draft of the Olney Master Plan that County-owned land on Bowie Mill Road identified as #17 is being recommended for use for affordable housing. This proposal was never publicly discussed before. All of us who moved here as recently as this year were told that the land was owned by the school system and might be used for a school at some future point. Most recently, the idea of relocating Olney Elementary school on this land was discussed. With other efforts by the County to ignore zoning rules and allow high-density moderately priced housing, we are very concerned about the possibility of constructing a large number of housing units on this land that would reduce our property values and make the severe traffic congestion on Bowie Mill Road even worse. The excessive development of housing in this area without any additional road improvements has made traffic a major problem. Just getting in and out of Darnell Drive during the morning and evening rush hours is extremely difficult and dangerous. In addition, GOCA recommends that moderately-priced housing in the area should be built in the town center area so residents are within walking distance of area businesses.

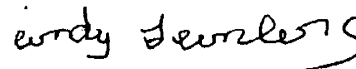
Please modify the recommendation for this land on Bowie Mill Road to read, "If the property is not needed for educational purposes, it should be used for park/recreation purposes." The description of the area should also point out that a high-pressure gas distribution line goes through the property.

Instead of more housing, what people in Olney really want is for the County to finally fund a police substation in Olney to provide a much-needed improvement in response times and general safety.

Thank you for your assistance.



Jay M. Feinberg
18125 Darnell Drive
Olney MD, 20832
Email: JayF425@aol.com



Cindy Feinberg

August 10, 2003

Mr. Derrick Berlage
Chairman, Montgomery County Planning Board
M-NCPPC
8787 Georgia Ave.
Silver spring, MD 20910

RECEIVED
1164
AUG 12 2003

OFFICE OF THE CHAIRMAN
THE MARYLAND NATIONAL CAPITAL
PARK AND PLANNING COMMISSION

Subject: MPDU Proposal for Bowie Mill Rd. Site

We have recently become aware of a proposal to consider the county owned 32-acre property on Bowie Mill Road as a site for MPDUs.

First let us state that we are not against the concept of MPDUs.

However, our understanding is that the actual construction of an MPDU was to take place in conjunction with a larger development of other types of housing. Placing an MPDU as a stand alone entity on the 32-acre Bowie Mill Rd. site does not seem appropriate.

The current zoning for the site in question is R-200 (Residential, one-family, approx. 1/2 acre minimum).

Considering the following with regard to the property in question:

- * A wetland stream bed that feeds the North Branch of Rock Creek runs through it.
- * There is a right-of-way for an active gas pipeline.
- * The only access is from Bowie Mill Road whose traffic is already nearing capacity most of the day.
- * The documented use of the property has been - for many years - as a site for an Elementary School which would require approximately 10 acres of the 32.

The only reasonable conclusion is that the property should continue to be studied as a potential site for an Elementary School. Or, remain as parkland.

Another concern that we have is the minimal amount of information dissemination to the people most affected. And the feeling that the door is closing much too quickly to allow community involvement in any decision.

Jerome Simon
Cynthia Simon
18121 Darnell Dr.
Olney, MD 20832-1768

cc: GOCA

Afzal, Khalid

From: Kiss, Tim [Tim.Kiss@sodexhoUSA.com]
Sent: Tuesday, August 12, 2003 8:48 AM
To: Afzal, Khalid
Subject: MPDU's near Cashell and Bowie Mill Road

It has just come to my attention that MPDU's have been added to the plan process near the intersection of Cashell Road and Bowie Mill Road. I am vehemently opposed to such an addition and want to be put on record as such. This would cause more undo traffic in an already overcrowded area as well as hurt the dynamic of the neighborhoods.

Tim Kiss
4613 Thornhurst Drive
Olney, MD 20832

8/12/2003

Afzal, Khalid

From: Linda Dunn [dunn.painted@mindspring.com]

Sent: Wednesday, August 20, 2003 11:16 PM

To: Afzal, Khalid

Subject: Olney Master Plan

Dear Mr. Afzal,

As a resident of Norbeck Grove in Olney, I was horrified to find out tonight at a special HOA meeting that affordable housing had suddenly been made an option for the site on Bowie Mill Rd. that was previously designated as a school. In my business experience, things don't just happen, there is an individual accountable for that action and I would like to know who made that change. It also seems very quick that the property had been transferred to the county in the middle of the master plan process. In addition to my concern for my property value, as a commuter to Bethesda, I sometimes wait 2-3 lights to get from Bowie Mill to Muncaster Mill Rd. This type of action is the antithesis of planning. I plan to join the multitudes of Norbeck Grove residents who will fight this proposed change. A master plan is supposed to take into account the community' needs. If an additional school truly is not needed (which is contrary to all the issues I hear about school crowding), why not put a much needed daycare facility (everyone gets on waiting lists for decent daycare) or elderly daycare or residences (as boomers age they need somewhere to go) instead. I do recognize that some affordable housing is needed, but to put it in more rural areas with one lane roads and already very congested traffic as opposed to places like Bethesda, or right off 270 or by metro stations does not make sense.

Perhaps my greatest issue with this situation is the lack of a process which values public input. Most Olney residents were absolutely surprised by these proposed changes to the Master Plan. The next public hearing is set for September 18th which is coincidentally the same day that Olney Elementary School has its back to school night. Am I expected to choose between meeting my Kindergartener's teacher or attending a meeting to save the value of my property? When people realize the date this meeting has been set, you will hear a public outcry. I suggest you change and publicize the change of the meeting date so the representation you get is truly democratic. I have worked hard and selected Olney over other areas in the county (e.g., North Potomac, Darnestown) for the prime reason of feeling I knew what type of area/community I was buying into, but now I feel like the political process has run amuck and I am in front of a steamroller with no way to change the situation. Please work for us and restore my faith in "the system."

Sincerely,

Linda Dunn
Norbeck Grove Resident

9/9/2003

*Pamela Shannon
18200 Darnell Drive
Olney, Maryland 20832*

August 27, 2003

Derrick P. Berlage
Chairman, Montgomery County Planning Board
M-NCPPC
8787 Georgia Avenue
Silver Spring, MD 20910

RECEIVED
1227
AUG 29 2003

OFFICE OF THE CHAIRMAN
THE MARYLAND NATIONAL CAPITAL
PARK AND PLANNING COMMISSION

Dear Mr. Berlage,

I am writing about the 32 acre property on the south side of Bowie Mill Road in Olney. The current draft recommends that this land is to be used for a housing development. I oppose any building on this land for several reasons.

1. It is the North Branch of the Rock Creek watershed and needs to be left alone to insure quality clean drinking water. Norbeck Grove (a LARGE housing development at least 500 houses and townhouses) has been built on the north side of Bowie Mill Rd which has put pressure on the wetlands that help filter our drinking water. The Upper Rock Creek master plan (page 39) states that "The low density nature of existing development in the planning area limits its impact on the stream quality. Future development of remaining vacant land will affect stream quality and habitat of the Upper Rock Creek watershed. Page 49 further states "The North Branch is the more sensitive tributary of the two in the considerable pressure on the stream. Protecting the headwater resources in a natural, undeveloped state is critical to sustaining the cold water habitat of the stream." Mother nature does not follow master plan boundaries and we must look at the larger picture.
2. The planning board has already approved the Upper Rock Creek master plan (Gazette Community News, August 6, 2003); therefore, it should be allowed to prevail as guidance for the Olney master plan rather than contradict it.
3. Bowie Mill Road cannot handle the additional traffic. No traffic mitigation was done with the development of Norbeck Grove and it shows. The Annual Growth Policy (dated April 2003 and approved July 15, 2003) placed Olney under a moratorium for new subdivisions. There seems to be no way for either a developer or the County to provide an adequate road infrastructure to mitigate traffic resulting from the establishment of affordable housing in the 32 acre Bowie Mill Road field. The moratorium has been in effect for the past 2 years and covers the next 5 years until 2008 (FY 2003 Annual Growth Policy, Dated July 2002, page 7, #1,3 and 5).
4. This property contains a major gas pipeline through the center of it.
5. This property contains an underground spring and is considered wetlands.

6. This property is home to many plants and animals – including migratory birds and geese.
7. This area is a transitional agricultural area – it is NOT suitable for high-density housing (Olney Master Plan pages 15-17, 21). Nowhere in the Olney Master Plan does it mention affordable housing on the Bowie Mill Road site, nor does it make room for R-200 zoning.

There are 22 large (15 are more than 10 acres) open land spaces in Olney. The majority of these lands (15) are zoned RNC. Many of the lands zoned RNC are not as environmentally sensitive as this one is. **Why is this headwaters land zoned R-200?** This land should be treated the same way the other open land in Olney is treated. If building is to occur, I feel the number of houses should be limited to one house per 2-3 acres (RNC zoning) to protect this sensitive wetland area.

The land on Bowie Mill Road is the **ONLY** space in Olney designated for MPDU's. I am not against MPDU's but I am against this land being the **ONLY** spot for them. This land is being singled out and this is discrimination. If this site is suitable for MPDU's then clearly **ALL** the open land spaces in Olney should be treated equally and the master plan should be revised as such. What makes this land any different? This land is not near any of the services nor is there any good public transportation to get to these services. It would make much more sense to place MPDU's closer to a town center. Again, this land should be treated equally.

My land survey indicates that this land is owned by the Board of Education, not the county. It has been said that the land is a reserved spot for a future school. I bought my house based on this information. I feel lied to by the county because the land records have never been updated to show the change in ownership.

IF building is to occur environmental, water/sewer, traffic, law enforcement, rescue/fire and traffic studies need to be done. In addition, any building on this land should be limited to have as little impact on the environment, traffic, schools as possible. Therefore a zoning of the land from R-200 to RNC should be considered. It is already extremely difficult to exit and entire my street from Bowie Mill Road, and morning and evening rush hour has become a nightmare. An additional 78 housing units would make this a traffic gridlock situation.

This land needs to be preserved to ensure a quality supply. If building is to be done, it should be limited and impact studies need to be done. Please take these thoughts into consideration as the plan for Olney is being completed.

Sincerely,



Pamela Shannon
Olney Oaks Homeowner

Dear Mr. Bertage/Mr. Duncan,

I am writing to you about the 32 acre property on the south side of Bowie Mill Road in Olney. The current draft recommends that this land is to be used for a housing development. I oppose any building on this land for several reasons:

1. It is the North Branch of the Rock Creek watershed and needs to left alone to insure quality clean drinking water. Norbeck Grove (a LARGE housing development at least 500 houses and townhouses) has been built on the north side of Bowie Mill Road which has put pressure on the wetlands that help filter our drinking water. The Upper Rock Creek master plan (page 39) states that "The low density nature of existing development in the planning area limits its impact on the stream quality. Future development of remaining vacant land will affect stream quality and habitat of the Upper Rock Creek watershed." Page 49 further states "The North Branch is the more sensitive tributary of the two in the Upper Rock Creek watershed.the medium density development that is present in Olney further east puts considerable pressure on the stream. Protecting the headwater resources in a natural, undeveloped state is critical to sustaining the cold water habitat of the stream." Mother nature does not follow master plan boundaries and we must look at the larger picture.
2. The planning board has *already approved* the Upper Rock Creek master plan (Gazette Community News, August 6, 2003); therefore, it should be allowed to prevail as guidance for the Olney master plan rather than contradict it.
3. Bowie Mill Road cannot handle the additional traffic. No traffic mitigation was done with the development of Norbeck Grove and it shows. The Annual Growth Policy (dated April 2003 and approved July 15, 2003) placed Olney under a moratorium for new subdivisions. There seems to be no way for either a developer or the County to provide an adequate road infrastructure to mitigate traffic resulting from the establishment of affordable housing in the 32 acre Bowie Mill Road field. The moratorium has been effect for the past 2 years and covers the next 5 years to 2008 (FY 2003 Annual Growth Policy, Dated July 2002, page 7, # 1, 3 and 5).
4. This property contains a major gas pipe line through the center of it.
5. This property contains an underground spring and is considered wetlands.
6. This property is home to many plants and animals - including migratory birds and geese.
7. This area is a transitional agricultural area - it is NOT suitable for high-density housing (Olney Master Plan pages 15 - 17, 21). Nowhere in the Olney Master Plan does it mention affordable housing on the Bowie Mill Road site, nor does it make room for R-200 zoning.

There are 22 large (15 are more than 10 acres) open land spaces in Olney. The majority of these lands (15) are zoned RNC. Many of the lands zoned RNC are not as environmentally sensitive as this one is. Why is this headwaters land zoned R-200? This land should be treated the same way the other open land in Olney is treated. If building is to occur, I feel the number houses should be limited to one house per 2-3 acres (RNC zoning) to protect this sensitive wetland area.

The land on Bowie Mill Road is the ONLY land space in Olney designated for MPDUs. I am not against MPDUs but I am against this land being the ONLY spot for them. This land is being singled out and this is discrimination. If this site is suitable for MPDUs, then ALL the open land spaces in Olney should be treated equally and the master plan should be revised as such. Why makes this land any different? This land is not near any of the services nor is there any good public transportation to get to the services. It would make much more sense to place MPDUs closer to a town center. Again, this land should be treated equally.

My land survey indicates that this land is owned by the Board of Education, not the county. It has been said that the lar a reserved spot for a future school. I bought my house based on this information. I feel lied to by the county because the land records have never been updated to show the change in ownership.

If building is to occur environmental, water/sewer, traffic, law enforcement, rescue/fire, and traffic studies need to be dc In addition, any building on this land should be limited to have as little impact on the environment, traffic, schools as possible. Therefore a rezoning of the land from R-200 to RNC should be considered.

This land needs to be preserved to ensure a quality water supply. If building is to be done, it should be limited and imp studies need to be done. Please take these thoughts into consideration as the plan for Olney is being completed

Sincerely,

James L. Young
19129 Cornell Dr
Olney, Md 20832
301-570-5288

Christina Young

RECEIVED
1229
AUG 28 2003

OFFICE OF THE CHAIRMAN
THE MARYLAND NATIONAL CAPITAL
PARK AND PLANNING COMMISSION

Afzal, Khalid

From: William Nolan [william_r_nolan@yahoo.com]
Sent: Sunday, September 07, 2003 8:18 PM
To: Afzal, Khalid
Subject: Olney Master Plan - Very Upset with proposed change!

I am just writing to tell you I am extremely upset with the proposed change in land use from a Montgomery County School to low income (affordable housing). Specifically, I am writing about the land off of Bowie Mill Rd and Cashell Road. I am a resident of Norbeck Grove and I am extremely disappointed with the county. I feel cheated that the county is now changing the zoning due to pressure from the developers. The area is far to congested as is and we can not take another 1000 residents. PLEASE DO NOT SELL THIS PROPERTY TO THE DEVELOPERS. I thought I bought my house knowing what would be built around me. I feel cheated knowing my home value will drop and my community will be overcrowded. I would have never bought in this area knowing this land would be used for low income housing.

Sincerely

Upset Montgomery County Taxpayer and resident of 37 years.

William Nolan
18308 Dundonnell Way
Olney, MD 20832

Do you Yahoo!?

Yahoo! SiteBuilder - Free, easy-to-use web site design software
<http://sitebuilder.yahoo.com>

Afzal, Khalid

From: N Wendt [nwendt@winhallgroup.com]
Sent: Wednesday, September 10, 2003 9:51 AM
To: MCP-Chairman
Cc: Carter, John; Afzal, Khalid; Stephen Smet (E-mail); Michael Knapp (E-mail)
Subject: Olney Master Plan Request for More Time

Dear Mr. Berlage,

Attached is a letter from the Olney Coalition, a group of concerned citizens from several neighborhood civic associations that are directly affected by the recent change in M-NCPPC's recommended land use for the 32 acre parcel of land on Bowie Mill Road. We are requesting more time in order to complete the analysis work that we have begun to understand what land uses are possible given environmental and other constraints on this parcel. We appreciate your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,
Nancy Wendt
nwendt@winhallgroup.com
301-260-1060

9/10/2003

Nancy Wendt
P O Box 1629
Olney, MD 20830

September 9, 2003

Mr. Derick Berlage
Chairman, M-NCPPC
8787 Georgia Avenue
Silver Spring, MD 20910

Dear Mr. Berlage,

I am writing to request that the public hearing for the Olney Master Plan scheduled for September 18 be rescheduled or a second public hearing be scheduled after October 30, 2003. As explained below, there has been a sudden and drastic change in the Plan in recent weeks that the community simply needs more time to assess. In addition, the current hearing date conflicts with back-to-school night for Olney elementary school parents who otherwise would attend the hearing and testify.

The Olney Master Plan process, in particular the community based planning aspects of the process, proceeded in a more or less normal manner until June of 2003. Up to that point, the 32- acre parcel of land on Bowie Mill (referred to in the plan as item # 17) was described in the staff draft of the Plan as Board of Education land to be used as the future site of the Olney Elementary School.

Somewhere between the end of June and July 24 when the Olney Master Plan public hearing draft was completed, this changed to County-owned land to be used "for a housing development with a significant portion as affordable housing." This is a radically different recommendation with significant implications for the environment, local flood plain, and therefore the community as a whole.

Area residents found out about this last minute change on August 12 when the Greater Olney Civic Association (GOCA) called a special meeting to discuss the draft Plan. Normally GOCA does not meet in August because everyone is away on vacation. Many missed this special meeting for that very reason.

Stephen Smet, President of GOCA, shared the following information with those who attended the August 12 meeting and subsequently with the press. (A copy of the Gazette August 20, 2003 article Bowie Mill Fate Concerns Residents is attached for your convenience.)

"Smet said most of those involved in the master plan process always thought of the property as a school site."

"Apparently, MCPS exceded the property, but it was not recorded, he said. They transferred the property to the county, but it never seemed to hit the land records. It's just one of those things that seemed to fall through the cracks. "

"We made decisions based on false pretenses. Even Kahlid Afzal [planner for the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission] worked under the assumption that it was a school site."

"Smet said that although the site is currently zoned R-200, he is not sure it would be suitable for development because of a pipeline and a streambed."

A coalition of residents from several neighborhood civic associations has been working around the clock since August 12 to understand what if any development the land can support and how alternative land uses fit with other County initiatives and policies. We simply need more time to complete this work.

In the five short weeks since we learned of the proposed change in land use, we have begun working with John Parrish (MD Native Plants Society), Jim Fary (Sierra Club) and other local environmentalists with expertise in geology and hydrology. They are visiting the site and helping us understand just how environmentally sensitive this land is.

Based on your comment to the press on August 6 (a copy of the article Planning Board Approves Upper Rock Creek Plan is attached for your convenience.)

*"The Upper Rock Creek Coalition has been very focused on density," he said.
"The Planning Board is focused on the environment."*

I am confident that you will support our efforts to do a full and careful analysis of the environmental constraints before making a land use recommendation to the County Council that could prove embarrassing.

We have engaged Richard Kline from Community Defense Services to perform an environmental assessment. Because of other pressing commitments, he cannot begin his work until after September 25. He estimates it will take several weeks after that to complete his analysis and report back to us.

Then we need time to inform area residents regarding his findings so that we can respond to Stephen Smet's and Khalid Afzals request for a specific recommendation regarding what the community wants to see done with the site.

Finally we need a different public hearing date so that *all* area residents, have an opportunity to present their testimony.

For these reasons I respectfully request that the public hearing be rescheduled or a second public hearing be held after October 31.

Sincerely,
Nancy Wendt

Copies to:

Mr. John Carter, Division Chief, Community Based Planning
Mr. Khalid Afzal, Team Lead Olney Master Plan
Mr. Stephen Smet, President GOCA
Mr. Michael Knapp, Council Representative, District 2

Bowie Mill fate concerns residents

Olney Master Plan draft calls for affordable housing on site

by Terri Hogan
Staff Writer

The fate of a 32-acre property on Bowie Mill Road was the center of controversy at last week's Greater Olney Civic Association meeting.

During the process of updating the Olney Master Plan, there had been talk as recently as June about moving Olney Elementary to a Montgomery County Public Schools-owned site on Bowie Mill, freeing up the current Olney Elementary site for a civic center. Many organizations in the community have long felt the need for a centralized, town hall-type of structure that could include such entities as the library, Chamber of Commerce, Mid-County Services and maybe even a post office.

After an outcry from residents of the Williamsburg Village community, distraught over the prospect of losing their neighborhood school, wording was changed in the staff draft of the Olney Master Plan stating that if the site were no longer needed for school purposes, the feasibility of a civic center/town commons on the site should be explored.

However, when the draft was released July 24, many residents learned

See **Bowie Mill**, page A-13

BOWIE MILL

Continued from A-1

for the first time that the site on Bowie Mill Road was no longer needed by MCPS, and had been transferred to the county.

The staff draft recommends that if the property is not needed for educational purposes, it should be used for affordable housing.

"Most of the master plan process was completed before the County Council issued a directive to Park and Planning to go find more sites for affordable housing," GOCA President Stephen Smet said. "Hearing about affordable housing raised heckles from the community."

Smet said most of those involved in the master plan process always thought of the property as a school site.

"Apparently, MCPS exceeded the property, but it was not recorded," he said. "They transferred the property to the county, but it never seemed to hit the land records. It's just one of those things that seemed to fall through the cracks."

"We made decisions based on false pretenses," Smet added. "Even Khalid [Afzal, planner for the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission] worked under the assumption that it was a school site."

Smet said that although the site is currently zoned R-200, he is not sure it would be suitable for development because of a pipeline and a streambed.

He described the Aug. 12 GOCA meeting as "not as contentious as it could have been," and said over 50 people attended, most of them living near the Bowie Mill site.

"I let everyone vent for an hour, and then told them to get themselves together and figure out what they want on that site," he said. "We can't create a vacuum."

Heidi Leineweber, a resident of Darnell Drive, went to the meeting prepared to voice her displeasure at the proposition of using the site for affordable housing.

"She did exactly the right thing," Smet said. "She discovered this and brought it to everyone's attention, and now we'll move on. I certainly understand her frustration."

Leineweber purchased her home, which abuts the field, in March.

"The survey showed the lot was owned by MCPS," she said. "I thought that if anything was built

there it would be a school, and I could have lived with that. If I had known that it could have been used for affordable housing, I wouldn't have bought the house.

"This is an investment, and you don't screw around with someone's bank account, and that's basically what the county is doing," she added. "People don't like MPDUs (moderately priced dwelling units), that is why I moved, to get away from them. You can't just put them in an existing neighborhood; at least in a new neighborhood you know what you are getting into."

Leineweber is frustrated by the process which she feels was flawed.

"The staff draft came out in late July, and there isn't a 60-day review period before the public hearing scheduled for Sept. 18," she said. "Plus, everyone's on vacation in the summer, so people haven't gotten the chance to review it."

GOCA, which normally does not meet in August, held a meeting this month to be able to address the Olney Master Plan before the public hearing.

Leineweber said she is concerned that Bowie Mill Road cannot bear the traffic that is already there, and is confused that the Upper Rock Creek Master Plan, recently approved by the Planning Board, designates the site as wetlands.

"Our community input is being ignored, at best," she said.

"At least the Williamsburg Village people had the opportunity to fight," she added.

Leineweber held a meeting Aug. 5, which attracted about 100 people to discuss the issue.

"People are upset that they weren't asked what they wanted," she said. "What did the county think ... that we would just say OK?"

She said that plans for a Web site, where visitors can answer a survey as to what they would like to see on the site instead of affordable housing, are in the works.

"Personally, I'd like to see nothing," she said. "Just because it is an empty field doesn't mean you have to put something on it."

In addition, the Web site will include information to help individuals prepare their testimony, she said.

"I plan to testify, as do a lot of other people," she said.

Leineweber said some of her neighbors are also exploring the idea of a class-action lawsuit.

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by Laurent Thomet
Special to The Gazette

The county Planning Board last Thursday unanimously approved the Upper Rock Creek Master Plan with provisions limiting development to a section of a property in order to preserve hundreds of acres of sensitive open space.

The document now moves to the County Council for deliberation this fall.

Derick P. Berlage, the Planning Board chairman, said the master plan would change zoning in the Upper Rock Creek area from Rural Estate to Residential Neighborhood Cluster, reducing the size of lots from one or two acres to a half acre.

A large coalition of area residents opposed the master plan, saying the proposed zoning change goes against the character of the neighborhoods.

The change would allow a developer to cluster homes in a section of a property, leaving large swaths of environmentally sensitive land unscathed, Berlage said.

At least 60 percent of a property would be protected under the plan, which affects an area wedged between Rockville, Gaithersburg and Olney.

"This is a plan that will provide significant protection to important environmental resources," Berlage said last week.

Four major properties in the master plan would be affected by the change — Casey (336 acres),

Dungan (132 acres), Freeman (339 acres) and Woodlawn (79 acres). The Woodlawn property would combine Rural Estate and Cluster zoning under the plan.

The board had considered requiring that the Casey and Dungan properties be combined, but that plan was taken off the table, Berlage said. The proposal was still described on the Planning Board's Web site before last week's 5-0 vote.

Another provision was removed from the master plan: a requirement that some housing be put aside for Moderately Priced Dwelling Units, or MPDUs.

Instead, Berlage said, the Planning Board is proposing that the County Council amend county law to require that a developer build MPDUs on Residential Neighborhood Cluster zones. There is no such requirement under current county laws.

The master plan was much debated before the Planning Board as residents voiced concern that the character of their neighborhoods could be affected by the changes.

Robert Kneisley, a member of the board of directors of the Upper Rock Creek Coalition, said residents "made clear that new development ought to be compatible ... with existing communities."

Development would be limited under the current zoning requirements because large sections of the properties would fail percolation tests, Kneisley said. Because a property has to pass a percolation test to install a septic system, few homes could be built under current

zoning, he said.

Berlage, however, said the number of areas that would fail percolation tests is unknown.

Cluster zoning would require that homes be hooked up to the public sewer system, therefore allowing a larger density, said Kneisley, whose coalition represents 15 communities and 4,000 households.

The coalition, Kneisley said, is worried that more density would lead to more traffic and overcrowding at schools. The coalition, he said, would support cluster zoning hooked up to public sewers if the master plan caps the number of homes that can be built in a property.

Although it may be possible that more homes could be built under cluster zoning regulations, it is "the only way that high-quality forests and wetlands suffer no degradation at all," Berlage said. The goal is to reduce suburban "sprawl," he said.

According to figures compiled by Planning Board staff, about 67 units could be built in the Casey property under cluster zoning regulations. Twenty-six units could be built on the Dungan property, 66 on the Freeman property and 15 on the Woodlawn property.

Berlage said those figures are estimates. The master plan does not specify how many units can be built.

"The Upper Rock Creek Coalition has been very focused on density," he said. "The Planning Board is focused on the environment."

Bowie Mill fate concerns residents

Olney Master Plan draft calls for affordable housing on site

by Terri Hogan
Staff Writer

The fate of a 32-acre property on Bowie Mill Road was the center of controversy at last week's Greater Olney Civic Association meeting.

During the process of updating the Olney Master Plan, there had been talk as recently as June about moving Olney Elementary to a Montgomery County Public Schools-owned site on Bowie Mill, freeing up the current Olney Elementary site for a civic center. Many organizations in the community have long felt the need for a centralized, town hall-type of structure that could include such entities as the library, Chamber of Commerce, Mid-County Services and maybe even a post office.

After an outcry from residents of the Williamsburg Village community, distraught over the prospect of losing their neighborhood school, wording was changed in the staff draft of the Olney Master Plan stating that if the site were no longer needed for school purposes, the feasibility of a civic center/town commons on the site should be explored.

However, when the draft was released July 24, many residents learned

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for the first time that the site on Bowie Mill Road was no longer needed by MCPS, and had been transferred to the county.

The staff draft recommends that if the property is not needed for educational purposes, it should be used for affordable housing.

"Most of the master plan process was completed before the County Council issued a directive to Park and Planning to go find more sites for affordable housing," GOCA President Stephen Smet said. "Hearing about affordable housing raised heckles from the community."

Smet said most of those involved in the master plan process always thought of the property as a school site.

"Apparently, MCPS exceeded the property, but it was not recorded," he said. "They transferred the property to the county, but it never seemed to hit the land records. It's just one of those things that seemed to fall through the cracks."

"We made decisions based on false pretenses," Smet added. "Even Khalid [Afzal, planner for the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission] worked under the assumption that it was a school site."

Smet said that although the site is currently zoned R-200, he is not sure it would be suitable for development because of a pipeline and a streambed.

He described the Aug. 12 GOCA meeting as "not as contentious as it could have been," and said over 50 people attended, most of them living near the Bowie Mill site.

"I let everyone vent for an hour, and then told them to get themselves together and figure out what they want on that site," he said. "We can't create a vacuum."

Heidi Leineweber, a resident of Damell Drive, went to the meeting prepared to voice her displeasure at the proposition of using the site for affordable housing.

"She did exactly the right thing," Smet said. "She discovered this and brought it to everyone's attention, and now we'll move on. I certainly understand her frustration."

Leineweber purchased her home, which abuts the field, in March.

"The survey showed the lot was owned by MCPS," she said. "I thought that if anything was built

there it would be a school, and I could have lived with that. If I had known that it could have been used for affordable housing, I wouldn't have bought the house."

"This is an investment, and you don't screw around with someone's bank account, and that's basically what the county is doing," she added. "People don't like MPDUs (moderately priced dwelling units), that is why I moved, to get away from them. You can't just put them in an existing neighborhood; at least in a new neighborhood you know what you are getting into."

Leineweber is frustrated by the process which she feels was flawed.

"The staff draft came out in late July, and there isn't a 60-day review period before the public hearing scheduled for Sept. 18," she said. "Plus, everyone's on vacation in the summer, so people haven't gotten the chance to review it."

GOCA, which normally does not meet in August, held a meeting this month to be able to address the Olney Master Plan before the public hearing.

Leineweber said she is concerned that Bowie Mill Road cannot bear the traffic that is already there, and is confused that the Upper Rock Creek Master Plan, recently approved by the Planning Board, designates the site as wetlands.

"Our community input is being ignored, at best," she said.

"At least the Williamsburg Village people had the opportunity to fight," she added.

Leineweber held a meeting Aug. 5, which attracted about 100 people to discuss the issue.

"People are upset that they weren't asked what they wanted," she said. "What did the county think ... that we would just say OK?"

She said that plans for a Web site, where visitors can answer a survey as to what they would like to see on the site instead of affordable housing, are in the works.

"Personally, I'd like to see nothing," she said. "Just because it is an empty field doesn't mean you have to put something on it."

In addition, the Web site will include information to help individuals prepare their testimony, she said.

"I plan to testify, as do a lot of other people, she said.

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