

Voices From Our Community: Support the Shady Grove Science Center

Grassroots supporters of the Shady Grove Science Center have been encouraging people to contact the County Council in support of the Gaithersburg West Master Plan (now called the Great Seneca Science Corridor Master Plan) through www.ScienceYes.org for most of the past year. County residents responded by **inundating** the County Council with over 1,500 supportive emails, letters and postcards in the months leading up to the Council vote. We have demonstrated beyond any doubt that there is broad and deep support throughout the County for investing in science and technology and for the kind of transit-oriented development this plan provides. At all the public hearings on this project, large numbers of ScienceYes supporters turned out to offer public testimony, effectively countering the voices of Science Center opponents who have gotten disproportionate play in the local media. The majority's voice was heard in this process too, and the Council has responded!

Here is a small sample of what Montgomery County leaders and average citizens have had to say in the course of this debate -- in support of this visionary plan to revitalize the Shady Grove Science Center:

Support for Science, Jobs, and a More Sustainable Community:

"We can be the place where solutions are found for the elimination of disease, world hunger, protection of the environment, and a reduction in energy consumption. The Gaithersburg West Master Plan is a critical component in helping the County to achieve this vision by creating a 'Community of Innovation' where the workers and researchers will live, work and play. Research parks are changing. Suburban models are being replaced by research villages where researchers can live, work, learn and play. We have the elements for a successful research environment, but to remain a leader, our model must change as well. With competition growing globally, nationally and regionally, it is critical that we define ourselves as a leader in the field of biosciences and that we create exciting and inviting places for these quality jobs within the County."

-- **Montgomery County Executive Isiah Leggett**

"It is an important and essential project.... What critics mostly miss is that the development plan is highly staged, meaning that each new round of building is contingent on major improvements in infrastructure to mitigate the infusions of new workers and cars.... By setting its sights high, the county will help ensure the long-range prosperity of a region whose promise has too often been compromised by short-term thinking."

-- **The Washington Post Editorial, "Science & the Suburban Future," March 28, 2010, p. A14**

"Smart growth implies wiser land use and infrastructure planning, transit-oriented development, more effective land use regulation and better urban design. It advocates adopting and implementing a number of specific principles that planners today universally embrace:

- Strengthening and encouraging growth in existing communities;
- Taking advantage of existing infrastructure and other community assets;
- Creating compact, denser, walkable neighborhoods with rational street-block patterns;
- Mixing rather than segregating land uses;
- Providing increased housing opportunities and choices, especially affordable housing;
- Providing a variety of transportation choices, including transit;
- Promoting development of attractive communities with a strong sense of place;
- Preserving, rehabilitating and using historic buildings;
- Preserving agricultural land and sensitive environmental areas;
- Making the planning and development process predictable, fair and cost-effective;
- Ensuring citizen and stakeholder participation in the planning and development process.

The Gaithersburg West Master Plan clearly embodies these smart growth principles."

-- **Roger K. Lewis, Professor of Architecture, University of Maryland, and nationally recognized expert on smart growth community design.**

“With the 270 Master Plans before you, we have an opportunity to move Montgomery County a giant step forward. We are at a crossroads. We can choose to embrace the bold visionary plans that enable us to move forward and to become a vibrant global center for creative jobs, technology, research, smart growth, and mass transit. Or we can choose the rear view mirror approach that leads to stagnation and decline with memories of what might have been.”

– **Gene Counihan, Former Delegate and Resident of Montgomery Village**

“Our community can greatly benefit from these high-paying jobs; additionally, we are committed to the type of ‘smart growth’ and transit-oriented-development that this plan represents. We also feel that Montgomery County needs the estimated \$1 billion in net new revenue that this project will produce. Our organizations and their constituents will be looking at your vote on the Gaithersburg West Master Plan as a defining issue in determining our future support.... We believe that the plan, as it stands, will result in significant benefits in terms of federal and state investments in public transit infrastructure, parks, and the engagement of key players in the development of the Science Center. We believe that scaling back or further delaying this plan would reduce the expected benefits of the plan, and therefore we oppose such reductions and delays. Furthermore, the plan as it exists already reflects extensive community input and now includes adequate staging requirements, new transportation facilities, more parks and other benefits to the surrounding community.”

-- **Hispanic Chamber of Commerce of Montgomery County, African American Chamber of Commerce, Asian-Pacific Chamber of Commerce and Asian-American Advisory Group**

“This project [the Gaithersburg West Master Plan] represents a unique opportunity to fulfill the vision of the I-270 corridor as a world class center for health, science, and education. The Shady Grove Life Sciences Center will be the kind of place where the world’s top scientists from government, the bioscience industry, healthcare, and education can come together to improve the health of the world.”

– **Dr. Richard Zakour, Executive Director, MdBio Division, Tech Council of Maryland**

“The Korean American community has worked very hard in spite of barriers to language, culture, and economics.... We have a wealth of researchers, scientists, and business people within our community that are encouraged by this plan and would want it to move forward. As a quality of life issue, we want to stay ahead of the curve to encourage as many intelligent based jobs as possible to the County. Montgomery County is recognized as an excellent place to live and learn, but also needs to be an attractive place to work. In these times of economic uncertainty it is encouraging to see organizations willing to bolster our competitive edge and create new opportunities. Our County should be a place to open doors – not close them.”

-- **Wonro Lee, president and CEO of JG Merchant Sales & Services, Co-Chair of the Asian-American Advisory Group**

“I support the Gaithersburg West Master Plan. ... I’ve stayed in Montgomery County because it’s my home and I believe it’s a great place to raise a family. I’d like my children to have the same opportunity, but with Montgomery County losing to Virginia on a pretty constant basis....I don’t see that happening.”

– **Todd Grinspoon, Neighborhood Resident, Woods of Muddy Branch**

“If we are serious about funding and building the Corridor Cities Transitway, we need to be committed to approving [the Gaithersburg West Master Plan] with enough density and walkable, transit-oriented design elements to boost ridership and raise the cost-effectiveness figures.”

-- **Gigi Godwin, President and CEO, Montgomery County Chamber of Commerce**

“I believe the reasonable concerns of all parts of the surrounding community have been heard and addressed.”

– **Eric Ross, Neighborhood Resident, The Willows**

“Vision 2030 asks us to look at mission; at what we want our City’s reputation to rest on. Is this where the cure for Alzheimer’s should be discovered, the elimination of TB assured and the early diagnosis of lung cancer confirmed? It gives us the opportunity to envision our role in fulfilling a universal, humanitarian mission. ... This is one of the times when a master plan needs to support a vision, and not one of the times when a vision needs to be limited by a master plan.”

– **Sally Sternbach, Executive Director, Rockville Economic Development, Inc.**

“Physical proximity is very important to the growth of an entrepreneurial industry. I’ve spent a lot of time in Silicon Valley, the national leader in life science. One of the reasons it works is that everyone eats breakfast at the same place! Many of us have spent years trying to build that same sense of community in our life science industry and this plan accomplishes that.”

– **Bruce Robertson, Resident, Willows of Potomac, and Managing Director, HIG Ventures**

“There is too much good at stake. Good for Shady Grove Hospital and its many existing and planned future services; good for our children, after being educated by top schools to be able to stay in the area; good for science, bringing cutting edge medicine to our doorstep; good for our tax base, and Good for all of our County’s families and businesses, to be thriving in the best county in the nation.”

– **Rex Reed, Resident, Amberlea Farm on Dufief Mill Road**

“There aren’t many places in the Country, or the world for that matter, that have everything it takes to build a visionary science and education center like the one proposed in this Master Plan. But we do.”

– **Marilyn Balcombe, Executive Director, Gaithersburg-Germantown Chamber of Commerce**

“We have been preparing students for a world class challenge in science research all of the 36 years I have taught in MCPS. Why not give them a chance to see a place where it can happen?”

– **Gregg Gochnour, Resident, Rockville, and MCPS Science Teacher**

“There’s no question that numerous international companies are still looking to open up locations in the U.S. The question is: Do we want their knowledge and their expertise here? Or do we want to hand them over to Massachusetts or California or North Carolina? If we want to become the premiere location for biotechnology — if we want to become the ‘go to’ location for these international companies who are flush with cash and looking for opportunities in the States — we need to create the vibrant, walkable, transit-oriented community proposed in the Gaithersburg West Master Plan.”

– **Roger Kang, Chief Operating Officer, TissueGene**

“I am in favor of the development of the Gaithersburg West Plan ...despite the growth and wealth of talented resources, we remain just another life sciences hub and not THE life sciences hub in the nation. One reason for this is the lack of a unique center that connects our entrepreneurs, scientists and business talent and cultivates the free flow of knowledge and ideas.”

– **Vik Subbu, Montgomery County Resident**

“For many, the local biotech community is not strong enough and has not yet reached the critical mass to absorb the layoffs by many small businesses due to the terrible financial crisis we are all facing. ...the Gaithersburg West Master Plan will help develop and grow the immense knowledge, scientific, and business potential contained in this region to offer unique professional opportunities as well as high quality of life.”

– **Paolo Baroldi, Resident, Potomac Glenn, and Chief Medical Officer, Supernus Pharmaceuticals**

“Why wouldn’t residents welcome the creation of good jobs that promise a bright future for professionals working in three of the strongest sectors during this economic downturn? Why not provide homes and shops nearby that younger adults can afford in a vibrant environment where we’ll want to live? Why not create a community that will attract international companies to our County?”

– Montserrat Capdevila, Rockville Resident and recent Bioscience Graduate Student

“In a business sector where intellectual property and technical ability are its most important assets, the quality of life for its human capital is paramount. The Gaithersburg West Master Plan addresses this critical need now and for our future generations.”

– David Marcille, Director of Support Services–Operations, BioReliance Corp.

“We are a perfect example of the kind of company that wants to be in Montgomery County, that tried to be in Montgomery County, but is not in Montgomery County because we were not able to find the right space here at a cost-point that fits our business model. Multiply this by the hundreds of other companies like us that make the same decision every year, and think of the tax revenue you are losing. Money that could be flowing into our schools, or the County’s services.... AITHERAS wants to grow to a \$100 million organization utilizing local talent and businesses for its work around the country. We feel we have a lot to add to the communities we serve, and we have plans to expand and open up several satellite offices within the next few years. Whether one or more of these offices is in Montgomery County is entirely up to you.”

-- Andrew Milisits co-founder and Managing Partner of AITHERAS, LLC

“The Sierra Club has lost all credibility if they can’t support the County Executive’s proposal to transform Gaithersburg West into a more sustainable, transit-oriented community, as proposed in the Gaithersburg West Master Plan. Since when is development around the light-rail Corridor Cities Transitway, which this plan makes possible, not transit-oriented development? Well, since never. This plan is in the center of our County’s technology corridor, in an area that is already developed in the worst possible way for the environment: Low-rise office parks surrounded by big parking lots. It is also where the County’s smart growth policies call for more jobs and housing to be concentrated. The plan the Council will be voting on has already been scaled down so it fits with the existing infrastructure that’s already there. It will be an asset to the surrounding communities, with new parks and open space, a mix of uses so people don’t have to drive, four new transit stations plus a network of hiker-biker trails. It is a far more sustainable community than what is there now. Clearly, the Sierra Club is out to lunch and seems more interested in spouting old-guard NIMBYism than actually advancing the cause of smart growth.”

-- Letter to the editor in the Gazette by Gaithersburg resident, Kristen Wesley

“The entire State of Maryland will benefit from the new jobs and investment opportunities in this new plan, which we see as an important element of our ongoing statewide efforts to attract more bioscience, medical research and healthcare companies to Maryland. The I-270 corridor is one of the leading employment centers in Maryland. It is a location where state and local growth plans have long anticipated significant levels of future employment growth. By concentrating new development here, where we have already the infrastructure, we can create much needed jobs and protect other more rural areas of the state and improve our environment.”

-- Juan Munoz, Executive Director, Maryland Hispanic Chamber of Commerce

“Everyone ought to be pleased we are opening the way to the high-tech, high-wage economy we know we need.”

-- At-large Montgomery County Council Member George Leventhal

The Concerns of Opponents Were Listened to, and Have Been Addressed in the Plan:

“Important changes made by the Council to the Planning Board’s proposal include:

- Scaling back the potential commercial development from 20 million square feet to 17.5 million. Given that the existing Gaithersburg West Master Plan allows 13 million square feet... the reduction from an additional 7 million square feet to 4.5 million additional is 35 percent.
- Providing protection against unacceptable levels of traffic congestion.....
- Requiring that 5,700 new housing units be part of the transportation staging plan....
- Requiring that the Corridor Cities Transitway not only be fully funded for construction from the Shady Grove Metro to Metropolitan Grove (the Planning Board proposal), but that it be at least halfway constructed before Stage 3 can begin....
- Establishing requirements for the non-auto driver mode share (NADMS) that are fixed
- Requiring stronger language... regarding protection of the view of the historic Belward Farm.....
- Including much more detailed descriptions of how the Master Plan will achieve environmental sustainability....
- Enhancing the Master Plan recommendations for parks in general, and on Belward in particular....
- Requiring an implementation monitoring committee be established by the Planning Board....
- Requiring that an advisory committee be established....
- Requiring additional affordable housing (... for the current site of the Public Safety Training Academy)....”

“During the past week, Planning, Housing and Economic Development Committee Chair Mike Knapp and I worked closely together, and with our colleagues, amended the plan in a way that enables substantial growth in the Life Sciences Center while also providing the needed protections against unacceptable traffic impacts. I thank Councilmember Knapp and our colleagues on the Council, and salute the many municipal and community leaders whose ideas and hard work helped shape this important master plan.”

-- District 3, Montgomery County Council Member Phil Andrews *(Excerpts from a statement he released after voting in FAVOR of the revised Great Seneca Science Corridor Plan – formerly known as “Gaithersburg West” – in an informal “straw vote” on April 13th, 2010).*