

VILLAGE OF FRIENDSHIP HEIGHTS

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October 14, 2025

Montgomery County Planning Board

Attn: Artie Harris, Chair

2425 Reddie Drive, 14th Floor

Wheaton, MD 20902

Re: 5550 Friendship Boulevard/Friendship Heights Sector Plan

Dear Chair Harris and Planning Board Members:

On behalf of the Friendship Heights Village Council, the elected governing body of the Village of Friendship Heights, I am writing to convey comments and recommendations from the Village Council—as approved at the Council’s October 14 public meeting—concerning the 5550 Friendship Boulevard property in the Village of Friendship Heights. These comments and recommendations are made in response to the Friendship Heights Sector Plan Update Visioning Process currently underway with particular reference to major sites in Friendship Heights that are considered candidates for large-scale development in future years.

Green Space Fronting the Office Building at 5550 Friendship Boulevard Must be Preserved to Address Quality of Life and Pedestrian Safety Issues

Comments: The property fronting the office building at 5550 Friendship Boulevard provides green, open space at a central location in the Village of Friendship Heights that effectively serves as a dog walking park and a play area for children.

The current use is consistent with the previous Sector Plan completed in 1998, which designated the building frontage as “Parks & Open Space” under its [Proposed Land Use Plan](#). However, the Montgomery County Planning staff, at the Existing Conditions presentation on May 30 and in subsequent presentation materials, has indicated this property is potentially available for additional high-density development.

Because the Village of Friendship Heights is one of the most densely populated municipal jurisdictions in the country, preservation of green, open space is absolutely essential to maintaining the quality of life in the Village.

Currently, the office building on the site already generates high levels of traffic within the Village that often makes it difficult for pedestrians, including many senior citizens, to safely cross intersections.

There is widespread concern that further high-density development of the property would not only eliminate existing “Parks & Open space” but also significantly increase traffic levels and exacerbate what are already serious concerns related to traffic and pedestrian safety.

Recommendation: The Sector Plan Update plan currently under development makes it clear that the green space fronting the office building is currently utilized as Parks & Open spaces by Village residents, and consistent with the 1998 Sector Plan, should continue to be utilized for that purpose.

Planning for Major New Development at Sites such as Saks Fifth Avenue Should Include Independent Traffic and Pedestrian Safety Studies

Comments: The Montgomery County Planning Commission’s Existing Conditions presentation on May 30, 2025, indicated Friendship Heights has a “Strong pedestrian network that is comfortable with the urban core.”

However, that description does not accurately describe current conditions. The [Urban Design Study](#), completed in 2024, noted residents reported “feeling unsafe” at various intersections throughout Friendship Heights.

The Village of Friendship Heights considers pedestrian traffic safety an issue of significant concern, both at intersections fully within the Village and on boundary streets along Wisconsin and Willard Avenues.

Those concerns were recently outlined in a [Request for Proposals](#) issued by the Village for a Pedestrian Safety Study of Village intersections.

Going forward, as noted as part of the Sector Plan Visioning process, large tracts of land bordering the Village, sites such as Saks Fifth Avenue ([see online map](#)), will likely undergo major development, which is almost certain to exacerbate existing traffic and pedestrian safety issues within the Village and the broader Friendship Heights area.

Recommendation: It is recommended that the Sector Plan Update currently underway should clearly reflect Village concerns related to traffic and pedestrian safety under both existing conditions and as large-scale new developments are planned at sites bordering the Village.

It is also recommended that, as part of the planning process for major development proposals, comprehensive and independent studies (not led by the entity proposing the development) be undertaken to:

- Document likely impacts of the proposed developments on traffic and pedestrian safety throughout Friendship Heights (not just on roadways and intersections immediately adjacent to the development), and
- Recommend street, intersection and related improvements, including estimated costs, to mitigate the impacts of proposed developments on traffic levels and pedestrian safety.

Thank you very much for your consideration.

Respectfully Submitted:



Roy Schaeffer, Mayor, Village of Friendship Heights

Cc: Elza Hisel-McCoy, Montgomery County Planning Department
Atara Margolies, Montgomery County Planning Department