

VILLAGE OF FRIENDSHIP HEIGHTS

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December 8, 2025

Mr. Elza Hisel-McCoy
Chief, DownCounty Planning
Montgomery County Planning Department
2425 Reedie Drive, 14th Floor
Wheaton, Maryland 20902

Re: Friendship Heights Sector Plan, Parcel 6

Dear Mr. Hisel-McCoy:

Thanks to you and your staff for meeting with representatives of the Village of Friendship Heights on Thursday, November 13, 2025, on a new Sector Plan. This letter is a follow-up to the discussion on Parcel 6, in the center of the Village.

Background on Friendship Heights Village

As you know, the Village of Friendship Heights is generally considered a highly attractive place to live with a strong sense of community. It has multiple high-rise residential buildings with approximately 5300 residents and 3000 housing units.¹ It also has office buildings, retail stores, restaurants, and many medical providers.

But it is the density of its residential housing that is notable: The Village of Friendship Heights has the highest population density of any census-designated place in the United States. Sitting on about 37 acres—less than one-tenth of a square mile—the concentration of high-density residential buildings within a very small land area accounts for its exceptionally high density.

Moreover, approximately 35% of the Village residents are 65 years or older. Because of its high proportion of older adults living in a neighborhood that was not originally designed for seniors, the Village is considered a Naturally Occurring Retirement Community or NORC. Many residents have chosen to age in place due to the area's

¹ Soon, another new high-rise residential building will be going up at South Park and Wisconsin Avenue, adding to residential density.

walkability, convenience to the Metro, and access to amenities, including top medical care in the neighborhood. Residents of the Friendship Heights area have a life expectancy of approximately 96.1 years, significantly longer than the national average. At the same time, there are hundreds of children under the age of 18 living in the Village, with many school buses traveling Friendship Heights streets every day.²

Created as a taxing district by the State in 1914, the Village is managed by an elected Council of seven members who work together and with a General Manager to foster a strong sense of community. A Village Center and adjacent park provide a welcoming environment where residents socialize at a wide variety of special events, including activities for children. A free shuttle service to the transit hub, supermarkets, shopping centers, and other local venues is provided on a regular schedule seven days a week. A contractor will be conducting a pedestrian safety study of Village intersections in 2026.

Because the Village is unique with respect to density of development, demographics, and quality of life, the Village Council believes it is critically important to emphasize “preservation” within Village boundaries as we plan for the future. As noted in a letter from Mayor Roy Schaeffer to the Planning Board on October 14, 2025, the Village is already struggling with a scarcity of green, open space relative to its population and high levels of traffic and pedestrian safety concerns. The letter recommended the Sector Plan Update, currently underway, reiterate the need to preserve green, open space within the Village with an initial emphasis on the property fronting the medical center at 5550 Friendship Blvd.

However, based on additional review and discussion, the Village Council believes it is essential that the Sector Plan Update acknowledge the Village’s desire to preserve green, open space within Village boundaries, both at the medical center site (Parcel 4) and at the site straddling North Park Avenue, Shoemaker Farm Lane, and Willard Avenue (Parcel 6). Additionally, this letter addresses the continued need for small-scale structures 40 feet or under on Parcel 6—supported in the last two Sector Plans to avoid North Park Avenue from becoming a canyon-like community with diminished natural light.

² According to the 2020 Census, the Village has 2,804 households and 1,003 families.

We further ask that the Sector Plan Update clearly state that the Village is much more densely populated than surrounding Plan areas³ and thus the planning approach is not identical—with the Village stressing the need to “preserve” existing green, open space and smaller structures within Village boundaries while surrounding areas, such as the Geico and Saks Fifth Avenue sites, with large tracts of open land, are much better positioned for additional high-density development.

North Park Avenue is the Main Residential Corridor

North Park Avenue, less than a third of a mile long (and fairly narrow for the amount of traffic it carries and the height of its buildings), is the main corridor for Village residents. Buildings fronting the north side of North Park Avenue include: The medical center, which sits at the corner of North Park Avenue and Friendship Blvd, with three commercial establishments at ground level on North Park Avenue (a market, auctioneer and karate school); The Elizabeth,⁴ a high-rise condominium with seven commercial establishments (a childcare center, deli, accounting firm, dentist, pediatrician, physical therapist, and hair salon); 4615,⁵ a high-rise apartment building; Page Park owned by the Village; and Willard Towers,⁶ another high-rise apartment building. Buildings abutting the south side of North Park Avenue include: The Willoughby,⁷ a high-rise condominium; The Carleton,⁸ a mid-rise condominium; four Parcel 6 buildings (discussed below); and 4620 North Park,⁹ a high-rise condominium.

Existing Conditions on Parcel 6

At present, the largest building on Parcel 6 is 4600 North Park Avenue, a 3-story structure of office condominiums built in 1989 with a large area of underground parking. Most of the 4600 North Park Avenue structure runs south along Shoemaker Lane. Current businesses in 4600 North Park Avenue include: Chevy Chase Foot &

³ Nor are the populations as old demographically.

⁴ Built in 1974, The Elizabeth has 352 residential condominium units and 13 commercial units.

⁵ Built in 1973.

⁶ Built in 1966.

⁷ Built between 1968 and 1969, The Willoughby has 810 residential condominium units and five professional offices.

⁸ Built in 1982, The Carleton has 140 residential condominiums.

⁹ Built in 1973, 4620 has 292 residential condominium units.

Ankle; Ambulatory Surgical Center; BuyersInc; Eye Rx; Law Offices of Jeffrey W. Harab; SmithLife Homecare; Soapbox Consulting; Titan Title; and RLAH@properties. RLAH@properties occupies Suite 100, which has an entrance directly on North Park Avenue in a section of the building that is only 2-stories high.

In addition to 4600 North Park Avenue, there are three other buildings in Parcel 6 that have entrances on North Park Avenue: 4604 North Park Avenue; 4602 North Park Avenue; and 4608 North Park Avenue. All of these properties have paved parking areas on their lots.

The small house at 4604 North Park Avenue, built in 1928, was most recently used as a dental office. A representative of the owner advised Village officials that the property was being held for investment purposes and that the asking price for this building, along with a single-family home on Shoemaker Lane (owned by the same individual) was \$6 million.

The Village of Friendship Heights owns the remaining two structures in Parcel 6 on North Park Avenue: 4602 and 4608 North Park Avenue. Previously an office building for attorneys, 4602 North Park Avenue is being rented by the Village to local artists as a workspace and also serves as a Field Office for the Montgomery County Police Department. Constructed in 1906, the Pyles House at 4608 North Park is the oldest surviving structure in Friendship Heights. The Village (which sold all its air rights to the building) is renovating the property to ensure compliance with ADA requirements. Future use by tenants operating a commercial café is planned.

With the exception of a mechanical room on the roof of 4600 North Park Avenue (about halfway down the slope), none of the current structures on Parcel 6 reach 40 feet in height. The height of the North Park Avenue buildings are roughly as follows: 36 feet (4600 N Park), 34 feet (4602 N Park), 30 feet (4604 N Park) , and 29 feet (4608 N Park).

Existing Parcel 6 Development Improves the Quality of Life Along North Park Avenue

Parcel 6 is located between North Park Avenue and Willard Avenue in the Village. It slopes down steeply from North Park Avenue to Willard Avenue and contains small-scale structures and mature trees. As currently developed, Parcel 6 permits an enormous amount of sunlight to reach North Park Avenue and provides visual relief (in

structure and green space) from the high buildings that surround it. This is because of the location of Parcel 6, which sits between The Carleton, the Willoughby, and 4620, and south of The Elizabeth and 4615 at its north end; and because its small-scale structures do not block the sunlight.¹⁰

Were high or mid-rise buildings to be constructed on Parcel 6, North Park Avenue would become a shadowed canyon for its many pedestrians and residents. The Village is very aware that residents who live in condos and apartments facing Parcel 6 selected their dwelling units on account of the sunlight and green space made possible by the low-scale development of Parcel 6. As discussed below, both their property and quality of life would be diminished if the Sector Plan conclusions relied upon over the past 50 years were to be abandoned. This is especially concerning as the bases for the conclusions in the previous Sector Plans have not changed: the need for green space, visual relief, and light.

Parcel 6 Planning and Zoning History

Prior to the 1974 Sector Plan, Parcel 6 consisted of 9 single-family residences on R-60 zoned property, while almost all of the rest of the Village was zoned either C-2 (General Commercial) or RCBD (Residential-CBD).¹¹ That Plan recommended, without differentiation, CBD-1 zoning for the entirety of the Village, including Parcel 6.¹² However, design guidelines for individual parcels reflected great differentiation, such that it was clear the Plan did not envision maximum possible development under CBD-1 zoning everywhere in the Village. Specifically, as to Parcels 6 and 7, the Plan recommended development that achieved “good spacing” from nearby larger buildings, “so as to avoid overshadowing the street and adjoining development.”¹³ Additional design Criteria for Parcels 6 and 7 included the following:

Some of the existing mature trees on both parcels should be saved and incorporated in the landscape design. The development should be designed so as to create a sizeable amenity open space, oriented toward

¹⁰ In fact, mature trees have grown up along North Park Avenue west of Shoemaker (three on the south side and two on the north side) encouraged by strong natural light.

¹¹ 1974 Sector Plan at 40, 48.

¹² 1974 Sector Plan at 49.

¹³ 1974 Sector Plan at 59.

North Park Avenue and the high-density residential structures to the northwest. This will tend to alleviate the growing 'canyon' effect of North Park Avenue.¹⁴

The current 1998 Sector Plan continued the CBD-1 zoning for all of the Village, implemented following adoption of the 1974 Sector Plan.¹⁵ It also showed that the proposed land use plan immediately east, west, and north of Parcel 6 was all high-rise residential, while Parcel 6 was a combination of parks and open space along with predominantly office mixed-use.¹⁶

Turning specifically to a detailed discussion of Parcel 6, the 1998 Sector Plan acknowledges that the 1974 Sector Plan included saving existing mature trees and creating a private amenity open space next to the trees.¹⁷ The discussion describes each building in Parcel 6 and notes that it "is the last remaining parcel in the Sector Plan area that has small-scale buildings evoking the character of the pre-high-rise era."¹⁸ Recognizing the importance of Parcel 6 in maintaining a necessary balance in diversity of massing, placement, and height, the 1998 Sector Plan sets forth two Objectives for Parcel 6:

1. Create a neighborhood park for the enjoyment of apartment residents and for visual relief from the surrounding high-rise structures.
2. Preserve as much as possible the small-scale character of existing structures.¹⁹

The 1998 Sector Plan also set out a set of six Design Guidelines that were consistent with the conceptual illustration that accompanied the two Objectives.²⁰

In sum, the 1998 Sector Plan, as to Parcel 6, is a thoroughgoing reaffirmation of the recommendations for Parcel 6 in the 1974 Sector Plan. In addition, as explained above, its recommendation for continuation of CBD-1 zoning in all of the Village cannot, in

¹⁴ 1974 Sector Plan at 59.

¹⁵ 1998 Sector Plan at 35-36.

¹⁶ 1998 Sector Plan at 34.

¹⁷ 1998 Sector Plan at 74.

¹⁸ 1998 Sector Plan at 74.

¹⁹ 1998 Sector Plan at 74.

²⁰ 1998 Sector Plan at 76.

light of the specifics set forth for Parcel 6, be viewed as a recommendation for the theoretical maximum density and height allowed in the CBD-1 zone.²¹

Until now, within the process of updating the 1998 Sector Plan, there has not been any further refinement of the planning and zoning recommendations for Parcel 6. Of particular note, however, is that in 2014, in the course of the County-wide recodification of the Zoning Ordinance, the CBD zones, like a number of other zones, were eliminated and properties in those zones were placed in other zones so as to most nearly approximate development allowed in the expiring zone. In this process, all of the CBD-1 zoned Village was placed in the CR 3.0 zone, with a 90' height maximum, and some block-by-block variation on the "C" and "R" components. This broad-brush approach cannot be read as an update to the land use and zoning recommendations of the 1998 Sector Plan.

The Village Opposes Construction of High or Mid-Rise Buildings on Parcel 6

As noted, the needs of Friendship Heights Village for light, green space, and visual relief have not changed since 1998. Any new development on Parcel 6 must advance the primary needs for quality of life in our densely populated community, just as has been the recommendation for this land over the past 50 years. Accordingly, the Village recommends no change in the Objectives expressed in the 1998 Plan for Parcel 6. Instead, the Village recommends that the updated Plan specifically recommend against any high-rise or mid-rise apartment buildings on Parcel 6 as detrimental to the quality of life in our community.

Both the bulk and the height of future buildings on Parcel 6 are concerns. Modest height is necessary to avoid the "canyon" and overshadowing effects taller buildings on Parcel 6 would create along North Park Avenue, Shoemaker Lane and Willard Avenue. As for bulk, any new buildings facing North Park Avenue will be seen as far greater in bulk as the ground rather steeply slopes back toward Willard Avenue.

²¹ Specifically, and most critically, in the CBD-1 zone the "normal" maximum height under optional method development was 60'. § 59-C-6.235(b). Height up to 90' could have been approved had the Planning Board found that it would not adversely affect surrounding properties. *Id.* It is all but completely self-evident that the 1998 Sector Plan analysis and recommendations for Parcel 6 would have effectively precluded Planning Board approval of CBD-1 redevelopment of Parcel 6 at a height in excess of 60'.

We believe these problems can be avoided by adjusting the quantitative elements of the CR zoning of Parcel 6, including restricting building height on Parcel 6 to 40'. This change could be forthrightly and justifiably explained as intended to facilitate constructing the sort of "missing middle housing" being sought all over the County.²² Parcel 6 is an ideal location for more affordable duplexes, triplexes, townhouses, and modest apartment buildings that fit within a 40-foot height restriction.

In sum, the Village recommends and fully supports a zoning change to facilitate the construction of affordable housing on Parcel 6, just as we would welcome implementation of the Objectives already clearly set forth for Parcel 6 in the predecessors to the current Plan update. Updating the Sector Plan in this fashion is a matter of vital importance to our community. We seek your assistance in making that happen. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Roy Schaeffer, Mayor
Village of Friendship Heights

²²See <https://montgomeryplanning.org/planning/housing/attainable-housing-strategies-initiative/>;
https://www2.montgomerycountymd.gov/mcgportalapps/Press_Detail.aspx?Item_ID=47394