



OFFICE OF THE COUNTY EXECUTIVE

Marc Elrich
County Executive

Testimony before Montgomery County Planning Board
Friendship Commons – Sketch Plan, Preliminary Plan, Site Plan, Forest
Conservation Plan Amendment
July 30, 2026

Good evening. I am County Executive Marc Elrich, and I am here today because of the gravity of this issue.

I am profoundly concerned about planning staff's decision and the Planning Board's acquiescence to move forward with this plan before addressing some fundamental process and legal issues.

I am not here to discuss the specifics of the proposed development. I am here to urge you to honor the process and acknowledge that the binding elements that accompanied the original project approval must be adhered to. In fact, last November the Board voted to allow this project to move forward under the 1998 Friendship Heights sector plan. The Board decision states: "The Applicant must comply with the binding elements of County Council Resolution No. 13-1461 approving Local Map Amendment G-760."

Any changes to the binding elements must follow the process that has been outlined in other testimony and that requires first involving the Office of Zoning and Administrative Hearings and the County Council. You are facing a lawsuit on that very issue.

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You cannot simply wave away these requirements by making assertions in the report and then voting them as true.

I have criticized Planning Board decisions before, but this level of disregard for a meaningful planning process is breathtaking.

You also have an obligation to ensure that this project is in substantial conformance with the existing sector plan, which is the 1998 plan. Your staff has chosen to dismiss parts of the sector plan or simply assert conformance, neither of which is acceptable or accurate.

This complete disregard for the process is a culmination of action over the last ten years by the Planning Board to replace the highly regarded planning process that included businesses, residents and community organizations with staff as technical advisors and where community representatives voted on the plans. You now have a process that is top-down, pre-determined and dismissive of community concerns where input is limited to post-it notes on the board.

Your decision last November to allow part of the approved Geico project to move forward at the same time that the sector plan was under active review has created a confusing process for residents who don't know what they are supposed to weigh in on and when and whether their input makes any difference. To date, their concerns have mostly been dismissed or minimized.

You will hear from numerous residents today about an array of concerns, and you must carefully review and consider the issues they raise. I served on the County Council for 12 years and also served on the PHED Committee so I understand the land use and planning review procedural requirements and, in this instance, you are not doing it

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correctly. You are seeking to erase the history of the work that has been done.

You are not here to simply facilitate a developer's proposal. You are here to take the time to understand the issues and carefully consider the law and all of the issues raised. If you're in doubt whether you are proceeding properly, you must slow the process down.

I support redevelopment of the Geico property and believe that it can be done well and successfully in collaboration with the neighbors. The agreements negotiated in 1998 reflect the hard work of both sides working together and finding compromises. Now, the developer proposes substantial changes that not only disregard standing agreements but seek to alter the established process used to craft them. It is up to you to address this underlying corruption of the process.

This property is by far the largest, most important parcel within the Sector Plan's boundary and beyond. How the process is handled is critical to preserving the rights of residents to be involved in planning for the future of their county and to plan for the future in a way that makes sense and makes us a better, more successful county.