Montgomery County Planning Board
Public Hearing
Friendship Heights Sector Plan
September 14, 2026

Video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z-DUlTbKzro

We're about to get set so everyone can sit down if you're planning to sit, but you can stand too. So good afternoon everyone, I'm Artie Harris, Chair of the Montgomery County Planning Board and welcome. We're delighted to be here this evening for the Friendship Heights Sector Plan Public Hearing Part Two.

So we have several folks here tonight so we'll be as efficient as possible. Several individuals have three minutes to present and groups have six minutes. So the process is that we're going to call up four at a time.

I'll always preference the next four. So the first four will be Debbie Heller, Lou Morseberger, Francine Kerner-Klein, and Christine Knauer. And to be ready behind them will be at the next group will be Tony Byrne, Clara Lovett, Mary Fortuna, and Barbara Wagner.

And before we get started this evening, I want to introduce Atara Margolis of the Planning Department that will go over the statement of record that we need to have for each of these meetings. Welcome. Thank you, Chair.

So I'm going to read a statement of record which basically outlines what documents are being entered into the public record and sets sort of as a legal introduction to the evening. So for the record, my name is Atara Margolis and I am the lead planner for the Friendship Heights Sector Plan and a planner in the West County Division of Montgomery Planning. This is a continuation of the public hearing for the Friendship Heights Sector Plan that began on September 10, 2026.

This public hearing was advertised in the Washington Times on August 6, 2026. This statement of record includes the same information as the statement that was read at the start of the public hearing on September 10. The Friendship Heights Sector Plan public hearing draft is a comprehensive amendment to the approved and adopted 1998 Friendship Heights Sector Plan as amended and portions of the 1990 Bethesda Chevy Chase Plan as amended.

It also amends Thrive Montgomery 2050 as amended, the 1979 Master Plan for Historic Preservation as amended, the 2013 Countywide Transit Corridors Functional Master Plan as amended, the 2018 Bicycle Master Plan as amended, the 2023 Pedestrian Master Plan as amended and the 2025 Master Plan of Highways and Transitways as amended. I will note that the following documents will be entered into the public record. The 1998 Friendship Heights Sector Plan, the appendices for the Friendship Heights Sector Plan public hearing draft, which are resource documents and not part of the actual plan.

A letter transmitting the public hearing draft to the County Council President, Natalie Fondy Gonzalez, dated August 6, 2026. A letter transmitting the public hearing draft to the County Executive, Mark Elrich, dated August 6, 2026. A letter transmitting the public hearing draft to Village of Friendship Heights Mayor Roy Schaefer, dated August 6, 2026.

A letter transmitting the public hearing draft to Chevy Chase Board of Managers Chair, Alyssa Leonard, dated August 6, 2026. The Friendship Heights Sector Plan working draft from July 26. The Friendship Heights Sector Plan scope of work approved by the Planning Board on February 6, 2025.

A copy of the newspaper ad and the affidavit of publication from the Washington Times, which is certified proof of publication in the paper's August 6, 2026 issue. All written testimonies received since July 16, 2026, when the Planning Board approved the publishing of the public hearing draft and set the public hearing date of September 10th and 14th, 2026. A recording of this public hearing in full, both parts, when it is available.

And all correspondence, including emails, received from the public and government agencies between the announcement of the public hearing and the close of the public record. The public record will remain open until midnight on September 17th, 2026, and that completes the statement for the record. Thank you.

Thank you so much, and we'll get started with our first presenter is Debbie Heller. Welcome. Do I have to hold this, or? You'll be able to.

Yes. Do you want to hold it, please? I do? Okay. All right.

All right. Thank you. Good afternoon.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I am Debbie Heller, Council President of the Town of Somerset. We support the plan's goals for a vibrant, walkable Friendship Heights with good transit, public amenities, safe pedestrian facilities, and appropriate bicycle connections.

However, we share the concerns of the Village of Friendship Heights and endorse its report. Two aspects of this sector plan are of particular concern to Somerset. First, the plan recommends major reductions in roadway capacity on Wisconsin Avenue and River Road without showing how those changes would affect daily uses or nearby residential streets.

Second, these proposals came late in the public process, leaving affected communities little time to review and respond. The plan would repurpose one general purpose lane in each direction on Wisconsin Avenue for dedicated transit lanes. We are concerned about reducing lanes on this heavily traveled commercial corridor.

Wisconsin Avenue is not simply a through road. Cars constantly enter and leave commercial buildings, medical offices, parking facilities, and intersecting streets. Dorset Avenue, a key Somerset accent point, already sees significant cut-through traffic between Wisconsin Avenue, Little Falls Parkway, and River Road.

We appreciate the planning department's capacity analysis, but it shows why more detailed study is needed. The analysis uses approximately 30,180 vehicles per day on Wisconsin Avenue and concludes that four general purpose lanes would remain within level of service E. The department's lower capacity figure is approximately 31,816 vehicles per day. That is too small a margin for a major urban artery, especially given the additional density envisioned in the sector plan.

The department also acknowledges that its analysis examines roadway segments, not intersections, signal timing, turning movements, and resulting congestion beyond its scope. MDOT and WMATA recently concluded that maintaining the dedicated bus lane beyond the WMATA project period was unwarranted. References to the future bus rapid transit extension to Friendship Heights amid a key condition in the countywide transit corridor's functional master plan, extension south of Bethesda only if and when the District of Columbia incorporates it into master plan or equivalent dedicated BRT lanes from Friendship Heights to the National Cathedral area in Georgetown.

That condition has not occurred and is not imminent. We therefore ask the planning board to drop recommendations to reduce traffic lanes on Wisconsin Avenue. Now for River Road.

The situation is even more serious on River Road, where the plan proposes reducing two lanes to one in each direction between the Willard Avenue area and Western Avenue, using the space for bicycle and pedestrian improvements. River Road is a major commuter route. During morning and afternoon peak periods, it carries heavy traffic and commuters there do not have the same metro alternative available to many Wisconsin Avenue travelers.

The department relies largely on average daily traffic, about 16,600 vehicles per day. To conclude, River Road is a road diet candidate, but that average does not answer the key question, what happens during the business morning and evening hours? For Somerset, reducing River Road to one through lane could make neighborhood access harder and create queues that spill back through neighborhood intersections. We support better sidewalks and pedestrian safety on River Road, but alternatives should be studied before eliminating traffic lanes.

Between Willard and Ventnor, for example, right-of-way outside the existing roadway may allow sidewalk widening and a landscape buffer without sacrificing a travel lane. The plan also proposes Somerset-specific changes, including a potential bike lane on Dorset Avenue and changes to the Marnie Shaw Path. Because these could significantly affect the town and were not developed in consultation with it, they should be deferred until consultation and community input occur.

Finally, we understand that Somerset house rezoning is an administrative update to eliminate outdated zoning. Planning staff has assured Somerset there are no plans for additional development there, and significant construction would be constrained by the required stream buffer. To protect Little Falls Branch and Vinton Park, the sector plan should state explicitly that no additional development is permitted in Block 1A.

In summary, we ask the board to require further traffic and intersection study before recommending lane reductions on Wisconsin Avenue and River Road, consider less disruptive alternatives for River Road, and defer Somerset-specific changes until the town

has been consulted and community input provided. And one last note, please, I implore you, do not fix what is not broken. Thank you.

Thank you so much. Next, Lou Morsberger. Hello.

I'm Lou Morsberger, vice chairman of the board of managers of Chevy Chase Village, and I thank you for the opportunity to present our board's recommendations on the draft sector plan. As shown in slide two, I will focus on the properties owned by CCLC, formerly the Chevy Chase Land Company, as they directly abut our 100-year-old community of single-family homes. We will separately submit detailed written testimony, but today I want to emphasize four points shown on slide three.

First, we strongly support the plan's overarching goals of revitalizing Friendship Heights and simultaneously protecting the residential character of our historic community, and we recognize that revitalization includes new housing. Second, the draft plan recommendations endorse height and massing levels adjacent to the existing neighborhood that lack adequate compatibility transitions, and we are recommending changes that address that need. Third, CCLC has asked the planning board to establish a maximum zoning building envelope and stop there.

This novel request is contrary to the very purpose of a sector plan, which tailors the zoning to a specific community by layering in considerations related to open space, green space, and transitional height and setback standards, all to ensure that new development will be compatible with and enhance existing neighborhoods. Fourth, the final sector plan recommendations must be implemented through an overlay zone that codifies recommendations that have the force of law, which is critical given the extremely close relationship between the CCLC properties and the abutting neighborhoods. We believe the following recommendations achieve the dual goals of allowing for robust revitalization and providing for compatible transitions to existing homes.

Slide four talks about the overlay, which is imperative to ensure plan recommendations are carried out. The overlay zone must include the compatibility recommendations of the plan, especially transitional heights and setbacks, open space, and minimum parking requirements. Slide five is an image prepared by our land planner that shows the maximum potential height and massing recommended in the public hearing draft.

This potential build-out looms. It looms over the existing homes along the eastern edge of the sector plan boundary and is grossly out of scale with those neighborhoods. In slide six, by contrast, this image shows our recommended heights and massing along the eastern edge of the sector plan boundary.

These recommendations create substantial redevelopment potential and yet establish a meaningful compatibility transition to protect existing village single-family neighborhoods. Slide seven shows the SAC's parcel, where we support the plan's 45-foot height limit on the eastern edge but ask that that be extended for a depth of 75 feet with a maximum height on Wisconsin Avenue of 85 feet. These proposed heights and setbacks, again, create significant redevelopment potential, but they establish a reasonable compatibility transition to the confronting homes.

Looking at slide eight, the collection property north of 2 Wisconsin Circle, we seek a 60-foot height limit on the eastern edge extending into the property as shown with a 170-foot height limit on Wisconsin Avenue to the northern half and a 200-foot height on the southern half. Slide nine shows the collection property east of 2 Wisconsin Circle. We are deeply concerned with the height and massing implications of the sector plan recommendations for this location, and we believe strongly that the height should be capped at 85 feet at the eastern edge, then increasing gradually from there toward the transit center.

For context, slide 10 shows Chevy Chase Lake as built by CCLC under the 2013 Chevy Chase Lakes Sector Plan. Building heights there were capped at 80 feet for the nearest homes 190 feet away. In contrast, the CCLC proposal made on Thursday would allow these tall buildings to be as little as 90 feet away from homes in our neighborhood.

Slide 11 shows another view of Chevy Chase Lakes with a heavily vegetated 500-foot buffer to the east between the 100-foot tall buildings and the nearest homes. The Chevy Chase Lake project only underscores that the current sector plan recommendations are unreasonable in light of the proximity between village homes and tall buildings, potentially tall buildings, in our neighborhood. Slide 12, so point being, our situation is unique, and Chevy Chase Lakes makes clear that a different standard was applied there.

Similar considerations have to be given to Chevy Chase Village. Slide 12 addresses open space recommendations that also must be included in the sector plan. Size minimums are critical.

They're directly tied to the functionality of open space. The plan should require a minimum of three quarters of an acre of open space in addition to the 10 percent minimum open space requirement. Open space must include significant vegetated areas.

We're not just talking hardscape. In summary, with slide 13, the village recommendations set out today will achieve revitalization goals so critical to the Friendship Heights community, but at the same time provide the critical compatibility protections that the existing community deserves. We ask that you incorporate our recommendations in the next sector plan draft.

Thank you. Thank you so much, and next is Francine Kerner-Klein. Hi, good afternoon, Chair Harris, members of the board.

Sorry, hello, now it is. Thank you. Okay, Chair Harris, good afternoon, members of the board, good afternoon.

My name is Francine Klein, and I am Vice Chair of the Village of Friendship Heights Council and also Chair of its Advisory Committee on Development. My testimony today supplements the 30-page report on the public hearing draft sector plan that the Village Council submitted to the Planning Board on September 9th. I want to talk a little bit about Friendship Heights Village.

If you were evaluating neighborhoods where residents take care of their apartments, owners take care of their buildings, and the community joins together in many social and

civic activities, Friendship Heights Village would be in the top tier. Our community has kept up with the times. Our condominiums have spent millions of dollars individually in recent years to upgrade their buildings with regard to energy efficiency, a goal of the county, infrastructure integrity, of course, very important, and decor.

Our rental buildings also have been modernized. All of our multifamily residential buildings have pools and fitness centers. There is a modern mix of studios, one-bedroom, two-bedroom, and three-bedroom units.

I say this because the current sector plan draft talks about our vintage housing stock, and I want to say that having lived there, having lived in homes in Bethesda, I don't think I'm living in a vintage property, and I don't consider those that are across the street, down the street, or up the street vintage either. The village, surprisingly to some, provides affordable housing. The synergy among village residential buildings actually produces naturally occurring affordable housing, which I believe the draft sector plan should acknowledge.

In the report we submitted to the board, we compare rental prices. The prices for a one-bedroom, one-bath apartment in the village are less expensive than the residences at Maza in D.C. In fact, those prices are close to MPDU prices, and we did that analysis in the report that we sent to you. We welcome additional affordable housing in the village, but limiting height and preserving green space are essential components of any redevelopment.

Quality of life and property in the village needs to be protected. That's why the 1998 sector plan promised village residents that any new building heights on existing developed parcels, which includes the Shoemaker parcel and parcel four, would be limited with the focus on open and green space, mature trees, natural light, and views. Now we've been told that the 1998 promises may need to be chucked because Friendship Heights is not doing well.

We strongly disagree with that premise. Here's why we disagree. First, the village itself is doing very well.

It continues to attract retirees, families with children, and single adults. There are three bus stops for Westbrook Elementary School in the village, a pediatrician's office, a child development center, and a karate school for children and adults. There's also another high-rise residential building in the village planned for Wisconsin and South Park Avenue.

Second, the village is already an economic engine for the area. Think destination shopping for medical care, with many medical providers clustered in the village. Individuals from all over the metropolitan area come to our village for medical care, and this should be a focus of the sector plan.

The sector plan, in my opinion, should also acknowledge the commercial success of the properties within the village along Wisconsin Avenue on the west side and along Willard Avenue on the north side. Here's what we see. Three beautiful high-rise office buildings, a Courtyard Marriott, three banks, The Gap, a Banana Republic, jewelry stores, a post office, a Starbucks, and a variety of restaurants.

This is a success story in a central business district that is both short and narrow, and I don't think there's enough maybe recognition of the fact that we're not Bethesda, we're not Pike

and Rose, we're not Rockville Center. We are narrow and short. Third, the sector plan should compare the economic activity that is occurring in the village to what is occurring across the street on the east side of Wisconsin Avenue.

At the collection, for instance, which has been struggling to achieve sustained long-term success from a combination of urban competition, shifting consumer preferences, and architectural limitations. But these problems have nothing to do with the number of residents living in the village, which has been roughly the same since 1998. And cramming more residents into the village, which is so densely populated arbitrarily, is not a solution to what's happened on the other side of Wisconsin Avenue.

And I don't believe that our residents should be tagged with the burden of fixing it. Hundreds of village residents who chose to live in the village, I'm almost finished, thank you sir, in the village rather than anywhere else, have shared their perspective with you about reaffirming the promises of the 98 sector plan. Do that and you will have supported a model approach to modern living in a tight-knit, high-rise community of which the county can be very proud.

Thank you very much. Thank you so much. Next is Christine Knauer.

Can you hear me? Okay. Good afternoon Chairman Harris and members of the Montgomery County Planning Board. I would like to thank all of you who came to visit us on October, I'm sorry, August 18th and walked our village so you saw for yourself what we're like and what our streets are like.

I'm Christine Knauer, co-chair of the Village of Friendship Heights Climate Committee, and I'm speaking on their behalf today. Also testifying later will be Andrew Miller, my co-chair, and Emmanuel DaSilva. I'd like to talk first about our village as it exists today.

We are a very dense community of about 6,000 residents who live in eight tall apartment buildings close to each other, most of which are located on North Park Avenue. Four are condos and four are rental buildings. I am a renter.

I have not ever owned real estate in Friendship Heights. We have a number of residents of all ages from the federal workforce, diplomatic corps, World Bank, AU university students who come from many different countries. There are a lot of retired people and also enough students to fill up school buses every weekday, and I look down from my sixth floor and I see our school bus in front of Willard Towers full of little kids going to Westbrook school.

There are also some large commercial buildings and a senior residence which attract many people daily who come from all over the DC metro area for medical appointments and other visits. About 35 percent of our long-term residents are elderly and 27 percent are seniors living alone. Many of these seniors have mobility issues so they cannot get to local parks to experience nature and light.

All they see every day is other buildings, sidewalks, and streets. Now North Park Avenue gets some light from the low-rise shoemaker property and the lawn in front of 5550 Friendship right now, but there's still right now are way too many shadows and not enough

green spaces. Right now we have dangerous crosswalks for seniors and school children at all of our street corners.

Traffic is heavy on our streets. North Park is currently a wind tunnel as the tall buildings funnel wind down the street's steep slope which you walk down from the Willoughby at the top to Willard Towers at the bottom where I live. It is also a heat island due to heat absorbing landscape from the buildings and sidewalks with little shade.

My rental building at the bottom of the hill is always in danger of flooding from excess rainfalls due to climate change. Now we're facing many more people in buildings with the current EYA plans to clear cut the existing Geico trees and build over 500 more dwelling units right across the street from our village on Willard Avenue. The result will be on that side of the street mostly hardscape.

So on North Park we'll have hardscape and on Willard we'll have hardscape. The current respite of trees, nature, and cooling will be gone for years. These residence cars will add to the current heavy traffic on all our streets.

Now I'll tell you how your new sector plan is going to aggravate all these existing problems. Putting a 15-story building at the 5550 Friendship Boulevard site removes one of the few open spaces we now have and it will loom over that park of North Park Avenue. It will block even more light, intensify the heat island, add to the flood risk, and funnel more wind down to Willard Towers.

And a tiny little one-half acre park on the corner will not make up for these losses. Allowing a seven-story building on the Shoemaker Lane site will put more of North Park in permanent shadow. Now it gets some light but forget it when that building goes up there will be no light on the street.

The tiny corner of green space you want to give us will not make up for this loss. Your proposed plan will double the population of our already a crowded area. We do not understand why you want to stuff even more large buildings into our crowded village in order to create an enhanced Friendship Heights sector.

As for creating a renewed shopping destination in this region, times have changed and people now order a lot of their things online as we see every day in our local building Amazon deliveries. They don't shop in these stores anymore. And now the Montgomery County DEP has stated that it wants to see increased tree canopy, reduced impervious surfaces, and improved storm water management.

So what would we like for you to do? For now stay with the 98 sector plan which foresaw some of these problems and work for adequate light and green space. They plan for moderate not excessive growth. As was done when the 98 sector plan was created, establish a working group of all stakeholders including yourselves, your planning board, Attara, Margolis, the county DEP, local village officials, community residents, and interested developers to create a new sector plan that will meet the needs of all parties.

Instead of the top-down plan you have given us, we're asking you to collaborate with all interested parties to develop a new sector plan we can all live with. Future generations of

young and old people will thank you for your cooperation in preserving these light and green spaces that we all need in our daily lives. Thank you.

Thank you so much. While the next group comes up, the group following them will be Margaret Van Amrich, Natalie Avery, Sandy Silverman, and Jim Brodsky. But now will be Tony Byrne, Clara Lovett, Mary Fortuna, and Barbara Wagner.

So we have Clara, Mary, and Barbara. Why don't we get started. So we'll start with Tony Byrne.

Thank you, Chair Harris, board members. My name is Tony Byrne. I'm a resident of Montgomery County.

First off, I'd like to say this is a very strong draft. Friendship Heights presents an extremely challenging but also very promising space. And I think the planning department has done a very good job balancing all the sort of, you know, diverse objectives here.

But what I'd like to do right now is kind of share what my wife and I think about this at more of kind of a personal level and why we support the general tenets of this plan. And there's really several issues here. First and most importantly actually has to do with our adult son.

He presently lives and works in New York City, but he and his partner are thinking about moving back to Montgomery County, which of course makes my wife and I very happy. He and his partners want choices of house, of home types. More importantly, they want to live in a walkable community.

They don't care about parking limits. They do care about things like dedicated bus lanes. In other words, they would be a place like Friendship Heights as envisioned under this plan would be very attractive for them.

We'd like Jackson, his partner, and their other Maryland friends to be able to live in Montgomery County and for Montgomery County to stop preventing the growth of the very types of housing, particularly apartments and condos and other multifamily housing, the very types of places that particularly these young people are likely to call home as they approach the second half of their 20s. The other constituents for this is ourselves, my wife and I. We're looking at downsizing now and we'd like to have choices. We may own, but I gotta say after three decades of home ownership, renting is looking pretty tempting.

We'd like to live in a world, my wife and I, where landlords have to compete for our business rather than the other way around. The only way to do this is to increase supply. To put this another way, the more massing, the more height, the better.

Thirdly is the issue of climate. This is how I got interested in land use in the first place. You, I believe, have already received written testimony from a coalition of Montgomery County climate groups.

This is a very broad set of individuals who have beginning now to weigh in on this issue. I just stand here in agreement with them. I'd like to conclude with a plea, which is not to water down the core tenets of this plan before sending it to the council.

Issues like height transition, buffering, I would argue that these are political issues best addressed in the council. Every neighborhood in this county has an obligation to shed our exclusionary past. I'll argue that that's a political debate best left for the council.

The planning department team has done excellent staff work here. I'm grateful for that and respectfully recommend that you support them by seeing the major tenets of this plan through. Thank you for listening today.

Thank you. And Clara Lovett. Thank you.

Can you hear me? Yes. Thank you for the opportunity to speak today. I wrote a number of comments on the working draft of the plan, and I will submit those.

They're much too long to be covered in the time I have allotted. I came in person for two reasons. One is I am a historian by training, and between 19, sorry, 2015 and 2017, when I was serving on the council of the village of Friendship Heights, I had the opportunity to organize the archival records of the village, which are stored in our community center.

And therefore, I had an opportunity to learn something about what happened after the 1974 sector plan, when residents had very strong reactions, and what happened when the 1998 sector plan was negotiated. Here we are in 2026. As a resident, not the member of the council, I was very interested in following the process.

I attended a number of the meetings when staff made presentations. I read whatever was available online. And I want to say that over a couple of years, most of the comments I heard from fellow residents were negative.

I came in person today to say that whatever one thinks of the plan, and we all have reasons to present questions and criticisms, the work of the staff should be recognized. It took a lot of effort by many people with different specialties. And I think you, as members of the board, were well served.

Again, one can criticize many aspects of the plan. When I look at the working draft, I see two flaws in the plan, and they are not specific to any parcel of land. They are general.

One flaw is that the way the plan is presented, each chapter is very strong by itself. Overall, the plan does not take into consideration the heavy stresses that Friendship High residents have experienced and continue to experience as we transition from a very suburban setting to something different, to an urban environment. We know that the transition is occurring.

We know that it is necessary, and many of us believe it's a welcome transition, but it brings a lot of stresses. And when you read the critical comments that you have received in writing or in oral testimony, you will understand why. Another point is that the plan relies too heavily on technical expertise.

It has an abstract quality. I call it an academic quality. I'm an old academic, so I don't use that term in a negative sense.

But it is detached from the daily reality of residents in the area. It is technically very strong, but actually very questionable as well. So, I trust that you will be willing to work with your staff to make revisions.

Thank you. Thank you for your comments. Next is Mary Fortuna.

Hi. Thank you for the opportunity to speak. My name is Mary Fortuna, and I'm a fourth-generation Montgomery County resident.

My husband and I own our home in the Willoughby, and my mother lives at the Elizabeth down the street. I support growth and affordable new housing in Friendship Heights, but I have concerns about the current draft, particularly in the way it treats Parcel 4 at 5550 Friendship Boulevard. This image shows that place.

Parcel 4's lawn is the only open green space of its kind in our village, where about 35 percent of residents are 65 years or older, and hundreds of school-age children have no designated play area in walking distance. The 98 plan recognized this by capping building height on this site and protecting over an acre of open space there. The public hearing draft cuts the open space by more than half, and as written, nothing would stop a developer from eliminating every tree on the property.

Also, because Parcel 4's step back has no limit, a building there could reach 150 feet or more. Today, as these images show, and there are three, Parcel 4 provides a play area for children and pets, a shady spot to stop and chat, and visual relief from the concrete high-rises all around. From the very beginning of this planning process, stakeholders have been clear about their interests for this property.

Planning's November 2025 report named loss of open space and trees as top concerns, and 345 people have signed a growing petition to preserve open green space on Parcel 4. This open space needs to be more than just a tiny patch of grass. It needs to allow light and to provide views of the sky and trees as it does today, and I believe that it could do even more. I'm asking that the draft be revised to reflect public input on Parcel 4 and to honor how Parcel 4 is used today, and so I have four requests for you.

First, that you keep redevelopment of Parcel 4 mid-rise, below the current 90-foot mapped height. Second, that you set a 75-foot height limit on Parcel 4's North Park Avenue frontage that holds even when a developer seeks extra height. Third, that you require 1.07 acres of open green space on Parcel 4 with a fixed location along North Park Avenue and Friendship Boulevard, making the placement binding rather than illustrative, and protect the trees there.

And fourth, that you require named amenities that respect and amplify how the space is now used. A children's playground, seating under shade trees, and inclusive exercise equipment. Once our trees come down and our open green space goes away, we cannot bring them back.

I ask the board to protect these critical elements of life and Friendship Village, and thereby thereby protect the people who need them. Thank you. Yeah, thank you so much.

Next is Barbara Wagner. Hello, my name is Barbara Wagner. I live at the Willoughby.

Thank you for this chance to talk to you about the rezoning of Parcel 4 as an opportunity zone. Picture one shows the label Somerset. Under that label is the 17-acre campus of the gated Somerset House community, with three high-rises and 410 units.

Although the Somerset House campus is immediately adjacent to the boundary of the Friendship Heights draft sector plan, it is ignored in the plan. Picture two below is, again, the beautiful green space on Parcel 4. And to the left is a very partial view of Willoughby North at 5500 Friendship Boulevard. It has 464 units in the North building, and many of these are affordable studios with young tenants and owners.

Picture three was taken at the intersection of North Park and Friendship Boulevard. It shows the Somerset there in the trees. Just to the left is the Park Somerset, which aligns with Parcel 4. Now, notice the no outlet sign on Friendship Boulevard.

But then we go down to the terminus of Friendship Boulevard. It is the terminus for many of the residents of Friendship Village, but there's no acknowledgment there's an exit from Somerset House onto Friendship Boulevard. There's an entrance from Friendship Boulevard into Somerset, and they're both gated.

These residents from Somerset House use Friendship Boulevard. They go back and forth to Willard and Western Avenues. However, figure 21 on page 125 of the Friendship Heights Draft Sector Plan does not mention Somerset House resident traffic on Friendship Boulevard.

It doesn't mention anything about traffic on Friendship Boulevard in that figure. As you evaluate Parcel 4, whether it should be rezoned as an opportunity zone, I respectfully ask you to consider the impact of Somerset House Friendship Boulevard traffic on its rezoning. I also want you to consider whether or not a rezoning is consistent with the binding elements of the 1998 Sector Plan.

Thank you. Thank you. So the next group can come up, and following them will be Carrie Kosicki, Jason Sherman, Vaughn Westlund, and Joe Zachman.

Thank you. Okay, so why don't we start with Margaret Van Armerich. Good afternoon, myself from Somerset House, as well as on behalf of many residents who have come from other residential buildings with units primarily facing the 5550 Friendship Boulevard building, which you can see here on Parcel 4. I speak to those who are critically dependent upon Parcel 4 for sunlight, airflow, and spatial decompression.

As you can see, there are many buildings around this center building. The white building is the low building, which is 5550. 5550 brings to the neighborhood unique spatial breathing room, which is a necessary element of all urban planning.

The site sits in the center of what is already the most densely populated part of the plan area, a tight concentration of high-rise residential buildings alongside a large assisted living facility. The relatively open area at 5550, with its low-rise medical buildings set back from

the street, now provides something essential in this dense setting. Light, air movement, breezes, visual openness, and a space between and among tall buildings.

The 1998 development plan recognizes this very concern, calling for guidelines to preserve visual openness and light for the high-density buildings in this area. The benefits of this site are also shared by others in the neighborhood. The property setback is used for play and recreation and is a valued amenity.

Good planning recognizes when an existing site is performing an important public function for the people around it. Raising the height to 150 feet, as shown on page 39 of the working draft, and potentially higher through incentives, would create a new wall of development. To me, the board should always insist on a basic planning principle.

New growth should not cause unwarranted harm to the people who already live there. The plan's goals rightly seek new housing and other improvements, but none states a parallel obligation of assessing the quality of life on existing residents. Sound urban planning has long recognized the public value of light, air, and visual relief between tall buildings, and New York's historic zoning rules contain guidelines precisely to prevent existing residents from being walled in by new development.

Thoughtful planning should accommodate growth while maintaining the same livability that it seeks to provide for any future residents. As urban theorist Jane Jacobs warned, planners should not treat a neighborhood as an empty map. This site is already serving people well in what it provides to the densest part of the sector.

It is supplying a living community organism that should be protected. Lastly, more density from a high-rise also brings more traffic, mechanical noise, including rooftop HVAC. It could significantly add traffic to a very small road, not easily able to absorb it.

And not an insignificant question is whether it would displace the medical offices that now serve the neighborhood and are important to assisted living residents and as one-stop medical access for those outside of the sector plan. In sum, I respectfully urge the board to maintain the current 90-foot maximum height for Parcel 4 and conduct a shadow or view-shed analysis before changing the height restriction. Thank you.

Thank you so much. And next is Natalie Avery. Can those in the rear, can everyone hear? Okay.

I mean, not just me, but when the speakers can. Okay. Okay.

So everyone, including myself, the speakers need to hold it close to their mouth as they speak. Thank you. Good evening, Chair Harris and board members.

My name is Natalie Avery and I am the Executive Director of the Friendship Heights Alliance. I am here tonight to testify in strong support of the Friendship Heights Sector Plan recommendations. The Alliance exists because of a question the Urban Land Institute asked in 2021 when a technical assistance panel was to look at Friendship Heights.

They asked, how does a place with this many advantages of metro station, parks, excellent schools, and once thriving retail end up struggling against competition from other walkable

urban retail centers? The answer pointed to two things. First, property owners, businesses and government stakeholders on both sides of Western Avenue need to cooperate across the D.C. and Montgomery County line and focus on the experience of the place as a whole. Second, and this is the point I want to spend most of my time on tonight, Friendship Heights needs and has room to add more housing in a bold and thoughtful way.

The underlying findings continue to resonate. Retail in this once thriving district has struggled for two main reasons. One is that very little new housing has been built here on either side of the jurisdiction line in decades.

The other is that there is a need for more housing types to serve people at different life stages and income levels. The Village of Friendship Heights is the best example we have of what's possible. High-rise housing sitting right alongside single-family neighborhoods, letting people put down roots, raise families, and age in place without relying on a car, all without leaving the community they love.

It's a wonderful model and one that's relatively rare, but it's one example in a neighborhood that has the transit access, the schools, and the infrastructure to support so much more. Friendship Heights is still in the process of transforming from a regional retail destination into more of a mixed-use walkable urban center. As the retail landscape shifts from primarily destination shopping centers to a fabric that includes more local serving businesses, shops, and restaurants, they need a steady stream of repeat customers, which means more residents close by.

Adding more housing and more types of housing is how this neighborhood builds the customer base to support the shops and the street life that so many people, including many who are willing to change, tell us at the Alliance that they want. I also want to come out of my county for how this planning process was won. Since the founding of the Alliance, we have offered Montgomery County planners a seat at our events, connected them with residents and small business owners who don't normally get rich through standard outreach, and used every channel we had, social media, a newsletter, in-person tabling, to spread the word about sector planning engagement.

The planning team matched that effort, surveys, webinars, and one-on-one meetings and touch points at festivals and busy shopping corridors. Just as important, they were honest from the start that the amenities people said they wanted, better street life, more activity, more services, would require adding more density to support them. There's also a county-wide case here.

Adding mixed-income housing in a neighborhood already served by Metro, multiple bus lines with parks, and great amenities, is about as green and equitable as growth gets. And even in its current underbuilt state, Friendship Heights generates roughly six and a half million dollars a year in net fiscal benefit to the county. That number could and should be much higher, and it will be if we give the neighborhood room to grow.

Finally, I'd ask the board to weigh not just the voices in this room tonight, but the people who aren't here. Young people, renters, and families across the region who assumed Friendship Heights either didn't have housing they could afford, or didn't have the kind of housing they wanted. With metal-in-home prices in Montgomery County now well above

$600,000, and over $2.2 million within a quarter mile of the Friendship Heights service area, fewer and fewer people can buy their way into a neighborhood like this one.

More multifamily housing near Metro is often the only realistic path in. This plan strikes a balance. It promotes thoughtful green and open space, respects the transition into existing single-family areas, and still creates meaningful room for new housing.

I urge the planning board to resist calls to scale back density levels, particularly on long underbuilt sites like the Geico property and the Sachs parking lots, and to support an ambitious plan that brings a full array of housing types into the neighborhood. This will open the door to people who have been previously and often generationally shut out. It will mean young people starting their careers or wanting to put down roots can live in a neighborhood served by Metro grocery stores and grade schools.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. Thank you for testifying. Next is Sandy Silverman.

Welcome. Is this on? Yeah. Good afternoon.

My name is Sandy Silverman. I'm a resident of 4620 North Park and a retired architect. I practiced in Montgomery County for almost 50 years.

Several of my projects are in Friendship Heights, Somerset House, the Carlton and Brighton Gardens. More recently, I was part of the architectural team for the 2,000-unit Strathmore Square sketch plan approval at the Metro station. I'm here to speak on behalf of 4620 Condo Association regarding any future development for the Shoemaker Parcels, which are adjacent to 4620 and would be the building most affected by any development on those parcels.

The slide shows the location of Shoemaker Parcels. The Elizabeth is to the north. The Carlton is to the east.

The new proposed condos by EYA are to the south and 4620 is to the west. The Shoemaker Parcels are the last remaining properties that still have small-scale buildings. The site is unique due to its topography as North Park Avenue is 45 feet above Willard Avenue at this location.

The planning department recommendations focus on taking advantage of this topography to balance future development with the community's long standing desire to maintain the small-scale character of existing structures and provide a variety of building heights as well as additional green space. Specifically for this site, the planning staff recommends a substantial setback from the 4620 east property line, locating taller building heights on Willard Avenue, 150 foot height maximum, and lower heights on North Park Avenue, 75 foot maximum. To take advantage of the topography to provide underground parking, include open space along North Park Avenue and seating areas on Shoemaker Lane.

Explore pedestrian connections from Willard to North Park Avenue next to 4620 and provide a diversity of housing types. The proposed zoning is CR3 with a maximum FAR of

3.0. The site area of the seven properties is approximately 48,850 square feet. An FAR of 3 is approximately 146,550 square feet or around 140 to 150 residential units.

We concur with the planning staff's housing and open space objectives of the sector plan. However, we strongly believe that they can be accomplished without having to increase the maximum heights to 75 and 150 feet. The exhibit now on the screen shows a test fit in which a viable apartment condo residential development that maximizes the full 3.0 can be developed within a 65 foot height limit on Willard Avenue and a 45 foot height limit on North Park Avenue.

The building steps down from the North Park as a series of stepping down and is broken up into three smaller scale complex. It also provides a large community green space on North Park Avenue and a continuous pedestrian connection between North Park and Willard. A small seating area can also be provided on Shoemaker Lane.

Next slide. The section sort of shows how this really works with 45 feet on North Park. Stepping down you get an underground garage below the building and it ends up with 65 on Willard.

65 is the exact same height of the new EYA condo across the street so the compatibility along Willard would be perfect in my opinion. I did a next slide. There's a second test fit which shows a 31 unit townhouse development.

This would create a new building type in the village and provide for larger family units which is another goal in the plan. Next slide. You can see a section here the way it steps down the hill and the entire complex of townhouses can be built within a 45 foot height limit.

From North Park all the way down to Willard. Another advantage of the 65 foot height limit is that any project can be built utilizing frame construction rather than concrete high rise construction. This is more economical and can probably be more easily financed in the current financial climate.

Also to be usable the open space concept recommended along North Park Avenue should have a minimum size identified in the sector plan. The planning staff recommended recommends a half acre open space for parcel four. Parcel four is twice as large as shoemaker parcel so I think at least a quarter acre parcel should be recommended and provided on the shoemaker parcel.

In summary the overriding concern for the Friendship Heights community with any future development is that it continues to maintain the sunlight air and views from the existing residents especially 4620 while still providing additional housing. The above test fits that I showed show that both the county and the community's objectives can be met in the new sector plan for the shoemaker parcels with only a minimal change to the height requirements. This can be a win-win for everyone.

The height adjustments of 65 feet and 45 feet can be made by applying further restrictions on the shoemaker parcel through modification to the overlay zone while leaving the basic overall sector plan constraints intact. Thank you. Thank you so much.

Next is Jim Brodsky. Good evening. Good afternoon.

This one working? Yes okay good. My name is Jim Brodsky. I live at 5610 Wisconsin Avenue in the Somerset House complex that's fully within the and a part of the sector planning zone.

I'm here representing this approximately 600 of my fellow Somerset House residents in 400 apartment homes in our complex and its governing organization the Somerset House Management Association or as we affectionately refer to it as SHMA. I'm the chairman that's what we call it. I'm the chairman of the SHMA external affairs committee and it's been our privilege to exchange sector plan ideas and recommendations on several occasions in person and in writing with Atara Margulies and the excellent planning board staff that's working so assiduously on them.

We're pleased to have both learned much from those exchanges and with the willingness of Ms. Margulies and the staff to consider our earlier recommendations and to be responsive to them. We very much appreciate this opportunity to share our views with you about just certain of the emerging sector plan recommendations. We live here.

We work here. We care deeply about it and its future and I'm going to focus in my brief time just on two of those recommendations trusting that our prior ones will get due consideration and hopefully be reflected in the final plan. Those two recommendations concern aspects of the development of the former SAC sites.

It sits directly across from our Somerset House complex on Wisconsin Avenue and the planned traffic transportation changes involving the bus rapid transit lanes in that same stretch of Wisconsin directly bordering again our Somerset House community. Our concerns about proposed recommendations concerning the former SAC site on permitted building heights and street access to it. With respect to the building heights and you've heard testimony about that and you've received written comments before we understand the current recommendation is they not exceed 100 feet along Wisconsin on that portion of the site that's directly opposite our complex and that permitted heights on the site generally step down away from Wisconsin reflective of the single family homes that border it and if that's the right understanding then we support this permitted height limitation and recommendation.

With respect to street access to that former SAC site to the extent that it is to continue to be permitted from Somerset Terrace. Somerset Terrace is the road that we own that's adjacent to our complex and it's if you can get access to that SAC site by crossing Wisconsin to enter it we do have several concerns. Our road Somerset Terrace and its intersection with Wisconsin is already overly congested as you've heard and as you know and as you've seen and you may have experienced cars routinely back up on Wisconsin and on our road Somerset Terrace to enter the medical building garage right on that corner they drop off and receive patients to see the doctors there and for for our residents for citizens of our village and our community it's particularly challenging for seniors and disabled to try to get across Wisconsin at that same corner.

So at a minimum then if Somerset Terrace is to remain such an access point to the SAC site we strongly recommend that it be neither the only such street access point or even a main

point for such access to the site from Wisconsin Avenue. Further we recommend the traffic be controlled so that only right or left turns be permitted both exiting and entering the site. Concerning and moving to our other issue that we're addressing the planned traffic transportation changes in that same stretch of Wisconsin that the one that directly borders Somerset House community we respectfully but strongly oppose the inclusion of BRT bus rapid transit lanes.

As we understand the recommendation it's that such that the BRT lanes be extended from Upper Montgomery County on Wisconsin through Bethesda to the French Heights metro station and indeed with two BRT stations permitting access to and from the metro buses and those BRT buses at both our intersection Somerset Terrace with Wisconsin and at French Heights. In our view such an extension of the BRT lanes particularly including a BRT station at our Somerset Terrace intersection would greatly exacerbate the already dangerous conditions at and around the intersection as I pointed to a little bit earlier. We request that no recommendation be made or included to extend the BRT lanes or service beyond the Bethesda metro station and that current business bus transportation options also remain.

Doing so in our view would permit the improved transportation connectivity and efficiency that appear to be the goal of the proposed BRT lanes and would help preserve the largely residential nature of this part our part of the Wisconsin Avenue corridor. We appreciate your extending this opportunity to share the collective views of the 600 of us in our 400 apartment homes will be so directly affected as the plan takes its final shape. Thank you very much.

Thank you so much. I see someone that crashed this table here. For the next group but you're here in all efficiency why don't you go ahead.

Good evening my name is Jason Sherman and I'm here today with Dan Pamikala about the shoemaker block. We represent a majority interest in the block and we have a request. Please remove the 75 foot height limit along North Park Avenue.

I was born in Montgomery County. I grew up here. My wife and I raise our four children here.

I started my business here. This is home. I'm team friendship heights all the way.

14 years ago I started my office at 4600 North Park. As my business grew I bought more. The Pamikala family has been part of this block for decades.

Neither of us is a developer and neither of us started thinking we'd sit here talking about a sector plan but we've learned. And most importantly what we've learned is we agree with almost everything in the draft plan. More housing, more affordable housing, active ground floors, public open space, a connection from North Park to Willard, compatibility with the people who already live there.

We want those things too. In support of that vision we gave it to an amazing architect who has had a lot of success in urban Montgomery County. We said please dream big, imagine and reimagine.

And so the draft plan asked for more open space along North Park. We imagined an open space that could become a gathering place. The draft plan asked for a connection between North Park and Willard and we imagined a 40 foot hill becoming something called the shoemaker steps, a destination for people and retail.

The draft plan asked for active ground floors. We imagined what was needed for somebody to want to spend an evening there. And what came into focus for us were kids sitting on the steps, friends having dinner outside, neighbors walking over for an easy access ice cream cone.

It no longer looked like a development project or a cement tower some may fear. It started looking like the heart of a community and as you can see there it really is central to what's going on in this block. We wanted to push further but we hit a wall which is the 75 foot restriction.

We reached out to developers and they said what you certainly are already hearing. Flexibility is critical. Density matters, height matters, construction costs matter, operating costs, incentives matter.

For a vision to come into focus someone still has to want to be able to build there. And as you can see the heights around it are all in the 150 to 200 range. We can plan for housing, zone for housing, draw housing on a map, but until somebody can afford to build it we haven't created any new homes.

And if restrictions make redevelopment uneconomic we don't just lose height, I think we lose years, we lose decades. People need what Friendship Heights can offer now. We lose housing, we lose MPDUs, we lose retail and courtyards, we lose the steps.

You can change to the next slide. This is sort of an aspect of our vision. We lose the opportunity.

I don't want Montgomery County to lose any more opportunities. The draft plan calls this block an opportunity site. And I understand why 75 feet did get put in.

Compatibility. It's important but look around North Park. On the previous slide I had 150, 167, almost 200 feet.

That's arguably a forest. And we're being told that the next tree should be limited to 75 feet. The best evidence of what belongs here is what has successfully been built here over decades under different economic and social conditions.

Friendship Heights is downtown made up of high rises. Compatibility is not height. It's setbacks, it's step backs, separation, landscaping, architecture, open space.

You can go to the next slide. It's the experience walking through it and living in it. That's what we should be solving for.

And that brings me to our neighbors along North Park. I believe I have a sense of why they're concerned. Some have lived there for decades.

They look out their window every day and they care about what they see. I do too. And I don't think we should pretend that these views won't change.

No matter what happens they will. It's important to say that out loud. The more useful question is what can we give the residents to look at? A 75 foot concrete wall or trees, people, open air, children, dogs, restaurants, a beautiful public gathering space that maybe someday they enjoy too.

I think that's the compatibility problem we're solving and a view that draws people in. That said, there's no building before you tonight. There's really just a vision.

No site plan, no wall. There's only an opportunity. Maybe the right building uses less height or more.

Maybe it steps back. Maybe the height moves around the site or our own concept already does a lot of those things. That's what the architects are for.

That's what the staff review is for. That's what community participation is for. And ultimately that is what this board is for.

So we're not asking you to decide tonight that a future building is compatible. Quite the opposite. I think it's fair to say make us prove it.

When there is a real building, make us prove it's worthy of Friendship Heights. But don't decide today that 75 feet is the only way to get there. We're not asking for special treatment if and you don't have to go back to that earlier slide.

75 feet is the special treatment. So please remove it. Because before we can prove that a great building belongs here, it first has to be possible.

You called the Shoemaker Block an opportunity site. We're simply asking that you leave it as an opportunity. Thank you.

Director Blanford Thank you so much. So the next group will be Kerry Kosicki, Yvonne Westland, Joe Zachman, and Jeffrey Haines. And then after that comes Benjamin Ross, Fabiola Yersinian, Andrew Snow, and Michael Berman.

Okay. So why don't we start with Kerry Kosicki. Kerry Kosicki Hello.

My name is Kerry Kosicki. I'm testifying on behalf of the Coalition for Smarter Growth. We advocate for walkable, inclusive, transit-oriented communities as the most sustainable and equitable way that the DC region can grow and provide opportunities for all people.

And we count over 4000 supporters across Montgomery County. We're here today to share our strong support for the Friendship Heights Sector Plan. It reflects the significant strengths that are already present in this community.

And that's not true across the county. This is a really special place. It has different types of homes to meet different people's needs.

It has a strong sense of community in place. And it has some of the most fantastic transit access. Yes.

How's that? Okay, thank you. So yeah, lots of different types of homes, strong sense of community in place and more public, oh, excuse me, and fantastic transit access, some of the best in the county. Is that better? It identifies ways to build on those strengths in ways that benefit new and existing residents alike, including safer streets, better connectivity to local parks, and more public places for people to gather.

It also identifies real challenges and changing dynamics that Friendship Heights has experienced since the plan was last revised in 1998. And it proposes ways to turn these challenges into strengths. That is exactly what a master plan is designed to do.

And I commend the planning staff for their dedicated work and engagement over the past two years to craft this thoughtful and visionary plan. I used to live in this area right down the street when I first moved to Maryland after college. I am personally really, really excited for the ways that this is going to benefit the area and breathe new life into it.

So I'm going to list some of those real quick, because I know you'll hear about them all day. But I'm really excited for the zoning changes. I think it is a wonderful thing to live near Metro.

I live near the Silver Spring Metro right now. And even moving from a 15-minute walk away to a five-minute walk away completely changed my life and the way that I experience our region and the city. Allowing more people to live near transit can be a life-changing opportunity.

And there are great sites in this area that have the potential to become places where more people can live, where new businesses can thrive. I'm very excited about that. Friendship Heights today has fewer young people and families than other parts of Montgomery County.

And building new homes, including those with family-sized units and new affordable housing, will allow more people to enjoy all the great things that this neighborhood has to offer. I'm also excited for the major bike and pedestrian improvements to the plan, which will not only make it easier for people to get around, including without a car if they choose to, but will also make it more pleasant to, you know, hang out on the street, walk around, grab a bite to eat with friends in places that right now feel like busy roads that aren't pleasant to sort of hang out and spend time on. And I think that can be a transformative change for how people experience the community.

And it will also bring in new residents to support thriving local businesses. More people means more customers for retail, restaurant, and entertainment opportunities. And so bringing in new people will help support these benefits and these businesses that everybody in the community can enjoy.

Finally, this plan is coming at exactly the right moment for Friendship Heights, which is ripe for a reimagining of underutilized commercial and retail spaces. That's a trend that has been national in scope, but it's particularly visible in Friendship Heights with retail vacancies. And

this plan will help transform these places into key parts of a thriving and transit-oriented community.

The way that we build is a political choice and a moral choice. It deeply shapes the opportunities that people have. It shapes the effect on our climate and it shapes equity.

When more people can live near transit, it means shorter commutes and more time with family, better access to jobs, friends, and family members across the region, lower carbon emissions, more equitable access to transportation for people of all ages, for people with disabilities, and it means more neighbors to enrich our lives and our communities and more customers to help local businesses thrive. This plan really comprehensively reflects that vision. So again, I want to commend planning staff for their work on this.

And that is exactly why CSG calls on you to retain its rezoning recommendations and height recommendations that are part of its bold and necessary plan for reimagining underutilized spaces in this community and building in a sustainable, inclusive way that allows more people to live near transit. We're facing an urgent climate crisis, an urgent affordability crisis. As you heard a previous speaker share, you know, when we fail to act on opportunities, especially for redevelopment, that shapes the future of that site and of a community for decades to come.

We don't get chances like this all the time. And so it's absolutely urgent to act now when we have this opportunity. When I read this plan, and like I said, I don't feel this way about every plan that I read, it made me feel hopeful.

It makes me feel hopeful that our county can do really great things, that we can make a significant dent in the intense climate and affordability problems we are facing. And yeah, I'm really excited about it and I hope you'll support it. Thank you.

Thank you so much. Is it Vaughn Westland? Yes. But we have another seat up here.

Is this Jeffrey Hainzen? And who are we missing? Benjamin Ross? Please. Hello, my name is Vaughn Westland and I live at 4620 North Park Avenue condominium in Friendship Heights. I moved up to Friendship Heights Village from Florida two years ago, and I'm extremely familiar with sprawl and overdevelopment.

Once the open space and mature trees are eliminated, the neighborhood is permanently changed and the climate is irreparably harmed by too much hardscape and huge towers. I would like to register my disapproval with the proposed Friendship Heights sector plan that would increase building heights to 150 feet on Willard Avenue on the Shoemaker block, formerly parcel six. Our building is the one that would be most impacted by a high rise building constructed next door.

4620's property line at Willard Avenue is only 10 feet from the Shoemaker block boundary. Our building was constructed in 1973. In that period, Montgomery County zoning regulations permitted high density high rises with minimal setbacks.

Later, master planners criticized these tight setbacks and increasingly favored more open spaces rather than walls of high rises. In fact, the 1998 sector plan recommended the

creation of a park and preservation of small scale buildings on the Shoemaker site. A new high rise that would be allowable up to 150 feet would block sunlight and airflow for all the 4620 units that face Shoemaker block at Willard, and thereby decreasing our property values and negatively impacting our quality of life.

The current sector plan proposal is regressive and backward looking. Seeking to cram another high rise into an already extremely dense area is misguided. Low rise residences such as those that were just previously described by Mr. Silverman are feasible for that site and would provide a diversity of building types and maintain Friendship Heights as a desirable place to live for future residents as well as retaining your current residents.

We need balanced growth, not overdevelopment. Thank you for considering the needs of our community. Thank you so much.

The next will be Jeffrey Haynes. Good afternoon Chair Harrison, members of the planning board. Is your mic on? Testing, testing.

Is that better? I'll move it closer. Good afternoon Chair Harrison, member of the planning board. I'm Jeffrey Haynes and chair of the Montgomery County Historic Preservation Commission and I'm appearing here today on behalf of the HBC to summarize our unanimous recommendation to designate the Edwin and Julia Reynolds House as a master plan historic site within the Friendship Heights sector plan.

On May 27, 2026, the HBC held a public hearing and work session to evaluate this property under chapter 24A-3 of the Montgomery County Code. After reviewing the staff reports, historic documentation, and public testimony, the commission found that the Reynolds House met three designation criteria. Criteria 1A, heritage significance.

The Reynolds House has exceptional value as part of Montgomery County's development heritage. Built in 1899, it predates surrounding subdivisions such as the hills, Friendship Heights, and West Friendship Heights. And it stands as a reminder of the pre-suburban landscape that existed before streetcar driven development.

It's the oldest of five houses built by descendants of Lewis and Sarah Solium, an immigrant family whose presence along Little Falls Branch spans 150 years. Four of those homes remain today and demonstrate the continuity of the family settlement in this part of the county. Criteria 1D, cultural and social significance.

The property owner, Lewis Solium, an immigrant from Galicia, Austria, served in the Union Army and later joined the Library of Congress. His family moved to Montgomery County during the post-Civil War expansion of the federal government. The Reynolds House also reflects transformative role in transportation.

The Glen Echo Railroad Company, enabling construction of the streetcar line, Edwin Reynolds, an engineer and surveyor, recognized the importance of the new transportation network and oriented the 1899 house towards River Road and the streetcar line. Criteria 2E, established visual feature. The elevated position within Willard Avenue Neighborhood Park overlooking the former Glen Echo Railroad right-of-way creates a memorable sight line that

reveals the historic relationship between Solium Properties, Little Falls Branch, and early transportation routes.

Trail users experience a rare glimpse of Friendship Heights' former rural character almost now entirely lost in the area. In conclusion, the Historic Preservation Commission recommends that the Planning Board forward the designation of the Edwin and Julia Reynolds House to the County Council as part of the Friendship Heights Sector Plan. Thank you.

Thank you so much. Next is Mr. Benjamin Ross. Good afternoon Chair Harris and Board Members.

My name is Ben Ross. I'm speaking as individual resident of downtown Bethesda and not on behalf of any organization. The staff draft moves in the right direction, but it offers only incremental change.

We have a housing shortage, a climate crisis, and a broken transportation system. We must do more. The plan still rests on an idea from the 1920s that people who live in single-family detached houses are somehow superior to everyone else.

You see that in the use of the phrases residential neighborhood and residential street to refer to the places that actually have the fewest residents. These places don't need to be protected. They need against outsiders.

They need to evolve to meet the needs of the 21st century. So what are my specific recommendations? First, we need more transit-oriented housing in Friendship Heights. The east side of Wisconsin Avenue should be zoned for a height of 200 feet to be compatible with the west side of the street and create a visual gateway between Montgomery County and DC.

I also think we need to create a gradual transition between Friendship Heights and its surroundings. Rezone the adjacent blocks of Brookdale and Chevy Chase Village for multi-family housing up to five or six stories. These are ideal sites for new homes and easy walk to metro stores and medical offices, yet shielded from traffic noise.

Second, we need to lessen automobile traffic on Wisconsin Avenue and Willard Avenue, which are the most residential streets in the area. Switch traffic to non-automobile modes where feasible, where traffic cannot be eliminated, relocated onto roads with fewer residents. We need bus lanes on Wisconsin Avenue, not just the study and never mind BRT, just bus lanes.

That has to include marked loading zones on the side streets so that delivery vehicles don't park in the bus lanes. I also think we need to open Grafton Street to two-way motor vehicle traffic between Wisconsin Avenue and Chevy Chase Circle and connect it with Dorset Avenue. This would enhance connectivity, relieve congestion, and divert traffic off of Willard and Wisconsin Avenues, which are very highly residential, onto streets that are much less residential.

So thank you for your attention to these ideas, and I wish you more success in your deliberations. Thank you so much. Next group will be Andrew Snow, Michael Berman, Evan Smith, Jad Donahoe, and Andra Miller.

Okay, why don't we start with Andrew Snow. Okay, does the mic work? Can everybody hear me in the back? My name is Andrew Snow. Thank you for this opportunity to give my comments.

I'm just speaking as an individual. I was a resident of Friendship Heights. I live in the Willoughby building, and I grew up in a neighborhood right next to Friendship Heights.

So I've seen it have its ups and downs over the years since the 1960s, when Grafton, by the way, was a two-way street for the last speaker. I really would like to express my disagreement with the working draft of the plan. I'd rather stick with the 1998 plan than have this new plan, and the reason is I think that it calls for, I would call, excessive increased density, mainly coming from the increased height permitted in the working draft, which I fear will seriously affect the quality of life of the existing residents.

I mean, we all want more housing and especially affordable housing, but there's limits to how much density you can shoehorn into this neighborhood that is already the densest place in the county. I mean, also, we would all hope that the residents of the new projects would primarily use walking and biking and transit to get around, and I try to do that, but let's be realistic. They're middle class Americans.

They're going to have cars. They're going to drive. So if you like the way the traffic feels when you drive on Wisconsin Avenue in the rush hour, then by all means, support this plan because it's just going to be another parking lot.

I question the analysis of the transportation in the plan. I understand there's a shortage of housing nationwide and in the Washington metropolitan area, but I do wonder whether there will be as much demand for new housing specifically in Friendship Heights as is kind of there's an underlying assumption in the plan that that will be there because there's a number of projects in the works. Once those are all completed, there will be hundreds of new units in Friendship Heights.

I would submit as one data point that in my building, the Willoughby, which is a great building, great location, prices have not appreciated in the last few years, and it's got all different size apartments. I live in a one bedroom that would be great starter home for a young single person or a young couple, and yet it hasn't appreciated at all. So I wonder if there's going after all these other projects come on board, whether there really will be the demand that would justify raising the heights of all these parcels.

Finally, I would and also I think the policies of the current federal government, much as they may appal many of us, are happening and they are reducing the size of the federal workforce. I'm a retired federal employee myself and they are regrettably trying to reduce the immigrant population, but I think that has will have an effect on the total population of the Washington area and that also could, you know, makes me question whether there will be such demand pressure. Finally, just as a matter of democratic accountability, I would

urge the commission to give tremendous weight to the views of the residents who live in the neighborhood as just a, you know, democracy.

Thank you so much. Thank you. Thank you so much.

Next is Michael Berman. Hello. Thanks for inviting me to speak.

I'm Michael Berman. I live in Bethesda, off River Road. I'm a civil engineer.

My mom lives at 5600 Wisconsin and my wife works at Westbrook Elementary right off river. As drafted, the friendship height sector plan falls short of its stated goal to increase accessibility. By reducing vehicular infrastructure and relying on private commitments for public amenities, the plan creates significant risks for current and future residents.

Two items of my concern, traffic and parking and the public amenities and open space. In regard to traffic and parking, the proposed plan systematically reduces roadway capacity as stated without offering viable alternatives. Eliminating parking on both sides of Wisconsin Avenue with no replacement parking proposed will worsen an already hazardous corridor.

The intersection of Wisconsin and Western is currently chaotic. At rush hour, severe backups along Wisconsin caused by cars queuing for Chevy Chase building combined with occasional double parking in front of the Barlow building create a dangerous public safety hazard. Furthermore, the proposed cross section for River Road between Western and Ventnor removes the two lanes of traffic east and west, and some of us still need cars, without adding any capacity elsewhere.

Removing travel lanes and parking while adding over a thousand new residents will exacerbate daily congestion, harm local small businesses, and create major accessibility hurdles for elderly residents navigating unsafe drop off zones at local medical offices and the metro. In terms of the public amenities, as shown in the sector plan, the concepts like Central Plaza and Gateway Plaza are welcome, relying on privately owned public spaces they call POPs. They pose a major risk to the community, I feel.

Privately owned parks such as the Dog Park at Wisconsin Place or the Brookdale Park space are demonstrably less accessible, less functional, and not maintained as well as the publicly owned spaces like the Hubert Humphrey Park. To ensure public benefit, the plan must bind developers to wave phasing plans. It should mandate the completion of the Friendship Commons Linear Park from Willard to Western and make sure that those improvements are done up front.

The higher density and building heights are only acceptable if the supporting infrastructure is built first. We urge the Planning Board to address these traffic, parking, and public space dedication requirements before approving the plan. Thank you.

Thank you so much. Next is Evan Smith. Oh, I'm sorry.

Sorry, Commissioner. I think, Fabiola? Oh, yeah, Fabiola. Oh, sorry.

Please come on. Sorry. Can everybody hear me? My name is, good afternoon, Chair and Commissioners.

My name is Fabiola Alvarez Yerkeson. I live in Bethesda in Montgomery County, District 1, near Glen Echo Park. Friendship Heights is my metro station.

I'm here today to voice strong support for the Friendship Heights Sector Plan, and particularly for the mixed-use rezoning and additional height near metro stations. I'm speaking as a resident, not on behalf of my employer, but for context, I have spent over a decade as a housing policy strategist and urban planner. I currently direct housing work at the Urban Land Institute Terwilliger Center for Housing.

I've spent my career helping communities build housing where it's most needed. Two main barriers stand in the way, zoning and the approval process itself. I expect the height and the density, as we have heard this afternoon, increases near the Friendship Heights metro station will draw the most opposition today.

I'm here to make the case to the Board about the opportunity this draft presents. Land near metro stations is the most valuable land Montgomery County has for solving its housing shortage. Every unit built within walking distance to a red line or metro station is a household that does not necessarily need a second car and does not compete for scare housing further out in the county.

Concentrating growth here at the metro station is in a commercial corridor that has lost retail, tenants, and is in need for reinvestment, protects the character of single-family neighborhoods surrounding Friendship Heights. This plan also strengthens the transition between mixed-use core and the Chevy Chase Village in Brookdale. This is the right sequences.

Height belongs where the transit and commercial infrastructure already exist, stepping down as it reaches residential blocks. I also urge the Board to hold firm on this plan's affordable housing initiative, especially including large-size unit mixed. Friendship Heights has fewer younger families than the rest of the county.

That is not an accident. It is a direct result of the housing stock does not include enough units families can actually use. Montgomery County needs more housing need transit.

This plan puts them in exactly in the right place. I urge the Board to recommend the sector plan to the County Council as drafted, preserving the added height near the metro station that makes this needed housing possible. Thank you for your time this afternoon.

Thank you so much. Next we'll have Evan Smith, Jad Donahoe, Andra Miller, and then I think I may have missed is is Joe is is Vaughn Westland and Joe Zachman here? Okay, okay, great. Thank you.

Mr. Smith, please go ahead. Thank you. Thank you.

As a 20-year resident of Friendship Heights, I share the Planning Board's observation that our community is notably missing educational and cultural uses. In response to this deficiency, our Village Council sent a letter to the Planning Board requesting a public library and performing arts center supported by petitions signed by roughly 500 residents. This community amenity will be will serve residents of all ages.

We have one of the largest concentrations of seniors in the region. We also have a growing number of families with children. Residents total over 9,000 in our broader area and there will be more when Friendship Commons is completed.

Many others will come to by metro or bus to the station within a block of the facility. It will become both a destination and the core of our community. Like the EYA partnership for a library near the Shady Grove station, EYA executives expressed support for a public-private partnership to build a public library and performing arts center in Friendship Commons.

This would be similar to the partnership arranged with the Wisconsin Place Developer for the County Recreation Center. Like it, the library project should be financed through Tier 4 and the County Capital Improvement Budget. I appreciate that your staff in the draft sector plan emphasized the need to prioritize and incentivize a library and arts or cultural center through new development.

I urge the planning board to explicitly include the public library and performing arts center in the sector plan and establish it as the principal capital improvement project under section 5.2 of the plan. Thank you for your consideration. Thank you so much and next is Chad Donahoe.

Thank you. We've all been dusting off our old 1998 Friendship Heights sector plan. Here's one gem that I found from it.

Typically the commission reviews master and sector plans every 10 years. All the plans every 10 years. Good luck with that.

Thank you for coming back and revisiting this one. We appreciate you taking the time and looking through it. Three things we think this I think this plan is doing right and one thing to improve.

We need new residents. We need new retail and we need new and improved public spaces. This plan offers all of those things but we also need strong and unambiguous language in here that there will be public investment in our public realm.

The county, Montgomery County Parks and SHA need to invest in this neighborhood. First we need new residents and for that we need a new variety of housing types and price points. In an age of Instagram and of Instacart and Amazon a neighborhood needs more density to be able to sustain the similar variety of retail that we could in the past.

We need people to be able to support the retail environment that we all say we want. Second we need that new retail and it needs to be reinvented retail. The department stores we used to have aren't coming back so we need new retail that connects with and actually supports our public spaces.

This plan identifies good locations for that new and improved retail. Thirdly we need improved public spaces. We have no shortage of people driving to Friendship Heights, parking in a garage, shopping at one place, getting their parking validated and leaving again.

We need to find more ways to get people to stay, linger a while in Friendship Heights, walk to another place, chain those trips together and to find activities and diversions that maybe weren't on their list. Those are the kind of little urban surprises that all great areas are capable of providing. Lastly we need our state, our county, and our public parks department to invest public dollars in the public realm and this plan needs to call for that unambiguously.

Urban parks need active uses and they need active edges. They need retail or kiosks or other active uses fronting them. They need that energy.

So do our streets and our sidewalks. There's been little to no public investment in Friendship Heights by the county in our public realm in wayfinding, in parks, in sidewalks, and in our streets. We need that public investment to make this plan what it should be.

Thank you all. Thank you so much. Next is Audra Miller.

Yes, hi. Can you hear me? Yes. Okay, great.

So I'm Audra Miller and I am a co-chair of the Ad Hoc Village Environment and Climate Committee with Christine Nauer who you heard from earlier. I've lived on North Park Avenue for nine years and I always tell my friends who live off in Bethesda and single-family homes that it's a lot of concrete but it's really a convenient location and it's been a great community to live in. I feel that the draft sector plan has made some concessions since its original version but it can go further and here are some changes I would like to see.

So in line with the Village's report and the recommendations in that report, I would like to see a limitation of the height of any building at 55-50 to 70 feet and a limit to 45 feet for the Shoemaker site on North Park. Taller high-rises will limit the sunshine in North Park and contribute to the wind tunnel effect that we already have which is pretty brutal in the wintertime, I can tell you walking down that street. For the open spaces that are proposed, I would like to see an increase in the size of the 55-50 Friendship Boulevard open space to greater than the proposed half acre and for the Shoemaker parcel open space it would be really good to have further definition in the sector plan of that space and the setback of the building that will be occupying that space because it doesn't seem like that is defined well enough in the sector plan right now.

For both of these spaces it would be really useful to create and keep them as natural areas with native trees and plants and this means no curated parks with impervious surfaces that become heat islands and it means limiting paved concrete sidewalks and also somebody mentioned earlier please don't pave our existing natural paths, the few that we have in the neighborhood. Also let's make sure to define green spaces in the sector plan as places that can be used by all. The way I read the plan there are exceptions to what was stated as a 35 percent requirement for green cover on privately owned properties and the way I read it that there are a number of exceptions that were listed in the sector plan for example if somebody had an intensive green roof they wouldn't have to comply with the 35 percent green requirement so we really want green space at ground level that everyone can use.

Also it would be great if we could include additional areas with denser tree coverage and my colleague Emanuel De Silva will be speaking in a few minutes with some details about that.

So these measures will give residents of Friendship Heights whether they're children, elders, or even our pets shaded and comfortable places to be and this will also support the environment by providing habitats for bees, butterflies, moths, and birds. Let's use further development under the sector plan as an opportunity to improve and collaborate together and improve our environment and quality of life and not degrade it further.

Thanks for your attention. Thank you so much. We will take the last four and then we will go on a five-minute break.

So the last four are Leanne Tobias, Shaza Borelli, Ms. De Silva, and Mr. Watkins. Ms. Tobias. Yes, you can share.

Hi, I'm Leanne Tobias, the chair of the Citizens Coordinating Committee on Friendship Heights, an alliance of 18 civic associations including six communities in or bordering the sector plan area. The planning board's important mission ranges from assuring housing and economic growth to protecting natural resources and enhancing quality of life. Incorporating these diverse goals in a sector plan requires balance but balance is lacking in the Friendship Heights plan.

The current plan adds up to 4,700 housing units, a 119 percent increase, eliminates over 90 percent of mature tree canopy, and roughly halves the number of vehicle lanes. The combined impact of these proposals deprives current and future residents of light, air, and views, destroys almost all existing urban forests, will sharply increase traffic problems and air pollution, and fails to meet the planning board's important charge to improve Montgomery County's quality of life and protect natural resources. CCCFH urges the planning board to rebalance the sector plan so that Friendship Heights emerges as a truly sustainable community offering sufficient light, cleaner air, urban forest, and green space while delivering ample mixed income housing, retail opportunities, and public amenities.

Here's how. On the GEICO phase one site, reverse the July 30th development approvals and restore the requirements of the original 1998 sector plan as the public was repeatedly promised. The 1998 requirements which the planning board agreed to in November 2025 restrict building heights to four stories, preserve mature tree canopy, and expand recreation space.

CCCFH believes that the planning board's November 2025 decision was legally correct and responsive to environmental and quality of life concerns while creating hundreds of new housing units including deeply affordable and moderate income dwellings. Reversal of the July 30th decision is well within the board's authority, upholds the county's sustainability goals, and restores much needed balance to the plan. The plan should be amended to improve light, air, green space, and views on both sides of Wisconsin Avenue while adding substantial new market rate and affordable housing.

To achieve these goals, CCCFH urges the planning board to adopt the recommendations in the testimony of Cherry Chase Village and the Village of Friendship Heights. CCCFH also recommends that the plan be revised to maximize incentives for the use of biophilic design throughout the proposed overlay zone including trees and other plantings, water features, animal habitat areas, organic materials, and access to natural light and airflow. This will

improve the health, productivity, and well-being of all stakeholders and enhance market real estate prices and real estate absorption.

The draft plan must be revised to prevent grave transportation problems. Current recommendations including DC's proposal to install a bike lane on Western Avenue would remove an estimated 13 vehicle lanes serving Friendship Heights, a 50% drop. The sector plan would also cut vehicle speeds on River Road, Friendship Boulevard, and Willard Avenue.

In combination with proposed density increases, these changes will sharply increase traffic congestion, vehicle delays, air pollution, emergency response times, and neighborhood cut-through traffic both in the immediate vicinity of Friendship Heights and in nine other communities near River Road and Western Avenue including Bannockburn, Kenwood, Little Falls Place, Somerset, Springfield, Sumner, Westbard Mews, Westmoreland, and Woodacres. Severe traffic problems can be expected under this plan. Studies by Montgomery Planning and DC already rate intersections serving the Friendship Heights area D, near maximum capacity with heavy congestion, E, at maximum capacity with protracted delays, and F, exceeding capacity gridlock.

These ratings are likely to deteriorate further. They rely on data that precedes the 2025 federal return to work and do not consider the plan's density increases, vehicle lane eliminations, and speed limit reductions. The plan's transportation measures will dramatically increase idling and air pollution.

According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, an idling vehicle can emit up to 20 times more pollution per minute than a vehicle moving at 30 miles per hour. This risk is especially acute in congested urban areas like Friendship Heights. Adverse health outcomes from such pollution include asthma, heart and lung disease, stroke, birth defects, and premature death.

Older adults and people with heart and lung disorders are at high risk. Instead of vehicle lane cuts, build bicycle lanes that link to the surrounding street grid through off-street locations, including side paths, the Willard Avenue Park, and the proposed Geico Greenway. Instead of reducing vehicle speeds, ensure pedestrian safety by adding crosswalks, enhancing crosswalks.

Ma'am, I'm sorry. You need to wrap up, please. I'm sorry.

All right, I'm almost done. Enhancing visibility, pedestrian lighting, signage, and signals, and installing painted safety zones to keep drivers away from curbs and corners. These are common-sense solutions.

They rebalance the Friendship Heights plan, and they expand mixed-income housing and commercial activity while creating an accessible and sustainable community. Thank you so much. I appreciate it.

Thank you. So next, is it Brielle? Yes, please. Sorry if I mispronounced.

No problem. Thank you. Can everyone hear me? I know you all are tired.

We are all tired, too, but I do ask for your attention. Thank you. My husband, Kandan Shankar, and I have been living in Friendship Heights for over 20 years and know it well.

I'll make two points as a resident, a voter, and a property taxpayer. First point, cutting lanes on River Road and Wisconsin Avenue is dangerous for neighborhoods. Imagine a balloon.

We know the expression, squeeze the balloon, the problem goes somewhere else. That's what's going to happen. The Friendship Heights sector plan, i.e., sector plan, uses a traffic model stating that it's possible to remove lanes on Wisconsin and River because the remaining lanes have enough theoretical capacity for the projected traffic.

This is a model based on assumptions, not reality. First, this isn't the same thing as demonstrating that drivers will experience no additional delays at individual intersections while the population will almost double on the Maryland side along with increased density on the Friendship Heights side of DC. Second, the model's overall conclusions don't consider what happens with cut through traffic in Brookdale, Friendship Heights Village, Bethesda, Chevy Chase's residential streets when drivers encounter congestion on Wisconsin, Western, and River Road, which is inevitable.

But I can tell you what will happen because it's already happening in Brookdale where we have no sidewalks. We already have constant cut throughs to the point that we avoid walking along the streets during rush hour. That means that cars are racing through the neighborhood.

They don't come to a full stop at the stop signs. All the while, these children are walking to their bus stops. People are trying to walk their dogs.

And some of us are actually walking to Friendship Heights or cycling to Friendship Heights. So it's unsafe. It's dangerous.

And at this point, it's irresponsible. Do not reduce the lanes at this juncture. See what's going to happen once the density increases.

We don't need redundant parallel lanes, bus lanes on Wisconsin Avenue along the metro line at this point. And enable cyclists to ride through our neighborhoods rather than cars. Second, oh god, compartmentalization does not help destination.

The one reason why Friendship Heights is flailing now is because not everybody is going to walk, ride a bike to Friendship Heights. It's not a destination. If we want it to flourish, there has to be some unified system to provide economical parking so that people can come and linger and go to the shops and the restaurants and amenities.

If there's not parking, we cannot rely on Friendship Heights to become a destination, no matter how dense it is. Because people cannot be expected to walk when it's raining, when it's cold, when it's 90 degrees out, when it's thundering, and when they have to carry heavy bags because they've gone to Trader Joe's or Whole Foods. Thank you.

Thank you so much. Next is De Silva. Mr. De Silva.

Thank you. Mr. Chairman, my name is Emmanuel De Silva. I'm an old dinosaur with a young heart living in... Oh, can you hear me? Can you hear me? Okay, so let me start again.

My name is Emmanuel De Silva. I'm an old dinosaur with a young heart. I see you're smiling.

It's true. I've lived in Friendship Heights for 40 years. I've come today to support my colleagues Christine Naur and Andrew Miller.

They spoke earlier, and also to testify in support of a proposal for microforest, which is mentioned in the Friendship Heights sector plan on page 122. So I would like to focus on two points, both on microforest. My first point is that microforest is a very good idea, and it's an effective nature-based solution to address the climate crisis, to address the heat island effects, and air pollution.

And I say this from my 30 plus years of experience of working around the world as an agriculture environment scientist. I used to work at the World Bank. So in addition to the proposed 5555 Wisconsin Avenue parcel, I recommend three more sites.

One would be 5600 Wisconsin Avenue by Somerset House condominium on either or both sides of the creek. This area has a few trees, but you could add density to shore up the creek, filter out pollutants, and help in stormwater management. The second area is Brookdale Park.

A microforest could be aligned with the proposed linear park there. And the third area is the Geico site. The 26 acres of this site provides ample opportunities for trying out new ideas in greening and foresting.

For the latter, I would recommend using the Miyawaki method. So that's what I want to focus on. The Miyawaki method in planting native trees densely, 30 times densely, was invented by a Japanese botanist called Dr. Akira Miyawaki over 40 years ago.

This has been used in 20 countries, including the United States. So you have in New York City, Atlanta, Massachusetts, Kentucky, and elsewhere, little pocket forests popping up everywhere. I will show you a few of these pictures later.

You don't need a large amount of land for a Miyawaki style forest. You can install these alongside streets, in housing developments, inside schools, my specialty, and commercial buildings using a grid format of three plants per square meter. So in a 420 square meter area, or about 4,600 square feet, the area that I have assumed is available for a microforest at 5555 Wisconsin Avenue Parcel, I have calculated you can plant 1,200 saplings of 30 plus species in a layered approach.

So you'll have very tall trees called canopy trees, you have medium-sized trees, you have shrubs, and a ground layer of herbs, grasses, and short plants. So these trees can be planted 30 times densely, they grow 10 times faster. They're all native species, so they're climate resilient.

This is the best thing you can do. Other cities and states are moving ahead with this Miyawaki method. So we have a great opportunity to make this happen in our county, starting with the proposed site 5555 Wisconsin Avenue, which is just down my street.

So let's get it done. Thanks. And if you give me one minute, I'll quickly run through some pictures without any commentary.

No, sir. Okay, thank you. But I appreciate it.

You sent it to us and we'd love to look at it. Okay. All right.

So our last speaker for this first session is Michael Watkins. Good evening, and thank you for the opportunity to speak. My name is Michael Watkins.

I'm a Montgomery County resident and an architect and urban designer with more than 38 years of experience designing walkable mixed-use neighborhoods. I was asked by residents of Chevy Chase Village to review the Wisconsin Avenue East portion of the Heights Sector Plan. I support thoughtful density, particularly around transit, but after visiting the neighborhood and the site, it became clear that the question is not simply how much density fits, but what kind of density is appropriate and where.

I would like to use the drawings to illustrate three important topics, context, the public realm, and diversity. Next slide. From the Charter of the New Urbanism, the development and redevelopment of towns and cities should respect historical patterns and precedents and boundaries.

This is the existing condition along the Belmont Greenway, shaped on one side by a neighborhood of one- and two-story homes, a difference of one story in height. Next, please. This is the Sector Plan proposal, a 60-foot building along this greenway with buildings rising to 200 feet in height along Wisconsin Avenue.

The drawing makes the issue clear. A countywide need for housing does not mean every site near transit should be developed to the maximum possible height. Transit is part of the context, but so are the homes that are already here.

These homes matter, too. Second, the public realm. Next, please.

This alternative replaces an arbitrary 45-degree compatibility plane with a line-of-sight plane originating from a person standing in the middle of the greenway, looking west over a building one story taller than the existing homes to the east, or 45 feet. The result is an appropriate transition in scale rather than an abrupt wall of development. I also urge the Board to think of this as Belmont Greenway, not a buffer park.

The greenway itself should be designed as a coherent and beautiful space. Again, from the Charter of the New Urbanism, a primary task of all urban architecture and landscape design is the physical definition of streets and public spaces as places of shared use. Next, please.

This same principle applies to Wisconsin Avenue. The public realm is defined by building type, frontage, uses, doors, and building height, all of which shape the street. Next.

As shown in the Sector Plan proposal, widening Wisconsin Avenue into the site encroaches on an already constrained site, taking away density and moving the tallest buildings closer to the existing neighborhood. Next. This alternative shows how to add density while

creating a better street with an arcaded sidewalk and habitable space above at the current right-of-way line.

It also allows for on-street parking, which is essential to commercial viability. Because, next, as the urban retail guru Bob Gibbs tells us, no on-street parking, no on-street retail. Next.

Can you wrap up your presentation, sir? Yes. Look at what is proposed next to West Grove Park. One edge is shaped by one- and two-story homes.

While the proposal recommends heights of 200 and even 250 feet for the other, this is not a compatible transition. Last slide. Single-family homes and high-rise multifamily buildings are not a range.

They are the extremes. The middle is missing. I urge the Board to require a diversity of building types and a thoughtful transition in scale, not simply greater height.

With this plan, the County can add housing, support transit, create a vibrant, walkable friendship heights, but it can be done in a way that respects the neighborhood. Sir, thank you. You have more than your three minutes.

You probably have five minutes. So, did you submit this? Yes. Okay, great.

We'll have it. We'll look through every piece, okay? Okay, very good. Thank you.

Thank you so much. And what we'll do is I appreciate everyone that came in the first session. It is important to get public testimony.

We appreciate you coming out tonight. We want to hear what you have to say. We will take all of that into consideration.

So, we're going to take a five-minute break, and then we'll start our second session. Thank you so much. Have a safe trip home.

Okay, we've started again the second part of our evening. We'll start with Mr. Roger Cochetti. Welcome.

You have three minutes. Thank you. Thank you.

My name is Roger Cochetti. I've been a resident of and a real estate investor in Montgomery County for about 35 years. Most of that time, my family and I have lived near Friendship Heights, and I live there today.

My background is an executive for high-tech companies, Comsat, IBM, Verisign, and CompTIA. I believe the plan should be redone to provide expansive green space. First, what is Friendship Heights? Friendship Heights is a densely populated, multicultural residential community with numerous amenities, a strong retail presence, and a strong medical services presence.

It has successfully navigated the global transition from storefront to online shopping and dining, and is transitioning from a predominantly senior community towards one that

includes families with children. It primarily lacks expansive green spaces, which are important for everyone and essential to fight climate change and heat islands. The plan lacks serious demographic analysis and projections.

Any plan must be built on a foundation of demographic analysis and forecasts, and this is not. With a population density of 90,000 people per square mile, we are the most densely populated place in America and the most densely populated metro neighborhood in Montgomery County. The plan must take into account the balanced distribution of population among Montgomery County's metro neighborhoods.

This plan does not. Global climate change is a serious threat to humanity, and adding expansive green space is a major way to fight climate change. This plan would import hundreds of thousands of tons of concrete and steel into the community, the worst possible thing that could be done to fight climate change.

The plan should be based on a goal of fighting climate change. It does the opposite. A major technique to fight climate change is to convert existing buildings to new uses, typically office to residential.

This plan should promote conversions, especially Geico and Sachs, but it would demolish many buildings and replace them with new concrete and steel. We have a serious problem with traffic congestion, adding an enormous amount of auto exhaust and noise. The plan would add thousands more automobiles to our roads and reduce the number of auto lanes, an environmental disaster.

We have a terrible heat island, a threat to everyone, but especially children and seniors. Large green spaces stop heat islands, but this plan would cover 90% of Friendship Heights with concrete and steel, worsening our heat island. It could not be more clear that the views of the people who live in Friendship Heights have been ignored.

The plan should be based on residents, not developers or lobbyists' input. For these reasons, a new planning effort is needed. It must begin with genuine consultations with the community and include non-biased evaluations of demographic, environmental, climate change, heat dome, traffic congestion, county population distribution, and other issues.

Thank you. Thank you. Next is Alison Fultz.

Good evening. Is this on? Thank you for hearing comments this evening. I'm Alison Ishihara Fultz.

I'm a Brookdale resident and a vice president of the Brookdale Citizens Association, but I'm speaking tonight in my individual capacity. I'll focus on process and context. Since we're planning for the next 30 years, the Friendship Heights sector plan should address context and focus on how it will be implemented to fulfill core principles.

As an example, the traffic proposal currently exists in isolation, both from other sector plan recommendations and from the areas adjacent to Friendship Heights. I'm a transportation attorney and I focus my practice on public transportation, so I'll be at the front of the line of those advocating for more robust transit options, and I think it's absolutely the case that

road diets are effective tools when they're carefully executed. The current draft sector plan, however, merely reflects a desire to reduce generally available traffic lanes by 40 percent.

There's no context. Over what timeline is this expected to occur? In relation to what other planning components? How does this proposal relate to efforts up and down Wisconsin Avenue and along Western Avenue? What coordination does Montgomery County propose with the district? As proposed in the draft sector plan, the proposed lane reductions are not a road diet, but a simple constriction of the vehicular movement in a very small area. So for that reason, the plan must place this proposal in the larger context it is intended to serve.

I want to make a few comments about the goals articulated on page five of the draft sector plan in section 1.2. Environmental resilience is listed as a priority. Start with this. Preserve existing trees and expand green spaces and tree canopy.

Preserve the trees first. The county must stop giving lip service to environmental sustainability by allowing the extensive destruction of existing specimen trees. The next issue is economic development.

Do not be prescriptive as to uses. On commercial real estate development, look carefully at existing conditions and trends. Contrast Connecticut and Western Avenue corridors in the district, because neighborhood-scale retail is holding on, but large-scale national retailers are not.

At figure 1.3, the concept framework plan, please reflect a much more robust pedestrian network in order to achieve the stated plan goals and also provide a schedule for developing open space in advance of development in order to support the proposed levels of residential development that the plan contains. The sector plan must describe coordination with D.C. and development goals on both sides of the boundary, because the Montgomery County discussion is only half the story. Finally, the planning board's recent consideration of the friendship commons development proposal just demonstrated how fungible sector plan recommendations are.

The community is understandably skeptical about the validity of the process, so this is an opportunity for the planning board to rebuild trust and show how it will support and improve conditions for those of us who live and work in the friendship height sector plan area. Thank you. Thank you so much.

Next is the duo of Pastor and Castro. Yeah. Okay, great.

Good evening. My name is Esperanza Pastor Nunez de Castro, and I am a resident of Frenzy Heights Village. I'm here to oppose the Frenzy Heights sector plan draft in its current form, particularly the level of development and increased building rights that it would authorize.

I support the revitalization of Frenzy Heights, successful businesses, affordable housing, workability and thoughtful redevelopment, but revitalization should not become a justification for overdevelopment and promoting the interests of a few developers over the current residents. The draft proposes substantial increases in development capacity through an already intensely developed area. In particular, I strongly oppose any significant increase

in building rights for the Shoemaker block parcels, also known as parcel six, beyond what is permitted today, which is already 90 feet.

The plan itself shows a block six with 90 feet and yet proposes increasing that height to 150 feet. That is not a minor adjustment. It represents a very substantial increase in potential building mass and height.

It should actually be reduced to 45. This is particularly concerning because these parcels are not isolated urban sites. They sit at the transition between already established high-rise residential buildings.

The zoning should be proportionate and balanced in its approach, rather than grant major additional development rights and then rely principally on setbacks and design guidelines to mitigate their impact. My second concern is green space, especially since the removal of protected and decades-old trees already in the GEICO site. Residents consistently are asking for more parks and green areas and the draft itself recognizes gaps in recreational amenities and limitations in the accessibility and quality of existing parks.

Yet the parks discussion also relies on broader study area and explicitly points to parks outside the plan area itself, like the Western Groove urban park, as well as regional spaces, Capital Crescent Trail, Little Forest Stream, things that are outside. Parks outside the planning boundary may certainly benefit residents, but they should not be used to create the impression that sufficient green space exists within the area where substantially new density is being authorized. If thousands of additional residents and substantially larger buildings are contemplated, meaningful public green space should be provided with the plan area itself, not through other areas, not through privately owned public spaces.

To address those issues, zoo maker block density could be reduced to 45, but even further, since we have like such a lack of green spaces, the plan should aim at establishing a park or public open space in those zoo maker block parcels that would serve the neighborhood, especially with the foreseen increased population for which Willard Park, the current existing park, would not be sufficient. Finally, additional density should be matched by infrastructure, as other residents have mentioned. I therefore respectfully ask the planning board to reduce the proposed overall development intensity, preserve current high limits, or even reduce for zoo maker block, if not converting it into a public place, require substantially more genuine public green space within the plan area within, and ensure that development rights are tied to demonstrated infrastructure capacity, which currently lack.

Thank you. Thank you so much. Next is David Schneider.

I think I have some slides as well. Good evening. My name is David Schneider, and I'm the founder of Transit Oriented Discoveries, a website that provides data and visuals to promote better places to work and live near America's transit stations.

I brought a few maps from my website to illustrate opportunities to ways to improve Friendship Heights through a brief data story. This first map shows the area within half a mile of Friendship Heights station, with a sector plan area outlined. Each dot represents a destination within walking distance of the metro, from restaurants and grocery stores to doctor's offices, daycares, and places of worship.

Friendship Heights has an abundance of walkable places near transit, 360 in all, about the same as the Wharf District or Tyson's Corner. The sector plan creates conditions for more people to live in the area, which means that more people can walk to daily activities, reducing traffic and lowering our carbon footprint. Next slide.

The second map shows the surface parking within a half mile of the station, about 652 square feet, more than 11 football fields, most of it in the sector plan area. That's about the same as suburban West Falls Church Station. Near transit, our policy should be prioritizing housing people over storing cars.

That's why I support rezoning the former Saks Fifth Avenue parking lot to a commercial residential zone and redeveloping the Geico campus by removing the Chevy Chase neighborhood overlay zone. Next slide. If we're planning for more residents, we should also plan on how they'll get around safely.

This next map shows the street network around the station, with streets labeled in white and intersections in red. Denser intersection networks tend to slow traffic and give pedestrians more route choices. The average block length in the area is 112 meters, about the same as more suburban areas in Hyattsville, Fort Totten, and Crystal City.

That's why I support the plan's proposal to establish new pedestrian routes and bike routes linking Chevy Chase Village and Brookdale to downtown, and implementing the recommendations of the bicycle master plan. Next slide. When it comes to safety, the widest arterial roads, such as Wisconsin Avenue and Western Avenue, shown in this map in orange, can also be the most dangerous because they carry the most traffic at the highest speeds.

The red dot on this map represents a life lost to traffic violence. On March 27, 2018, Kenneth Clark, a 19-year-old freshman at American University, was struck and killed by a car traveling west on Western Avenue while crossing Western and Wisconsin Avenue. Complete streets can improve safety.

Sharing the road with buses and bicycles can improve safety. Road diets can improve safety. And that's why I support adding protected crossings and a dedicated bus lane on Wisconsin Avenue from Western Avenue to Oliver Street.

Thank you for listening to my data story. I believe good data in the hands of the right people can lead to great places. The sector's plan's vision will improve friendship heights, and I encourage you to adopt its recommendations.

Thank you so much. The next group is Tino Calabia, Don Calabia, Manuel Ochoa, and Michael Larkin. You can go ahead and start, okay? Yeah, since you're here first.

The first shall be first. Good evening, Chair Harris and commissioners of the planning board. My name is Michael Larkin.

Oh, do I get three or... I thought I was under the... Though I could probably do it in that time. I just... I could always adjust my speech on the fly. I just want to make sure where I was at.

That's okay. Okay, I'll start again. Good evening, Chair Harris and commissioners of the planning board.

My name is Michael Larkin, and tonight I'm representing the Action Committee for Transit. Thank you for the opportunity to speak tonight. I greatly appreciate it.

The friendship heights sector plan arrives at an opportune time. The necessary but inconvenient shutdown of the red line this summer showed that we can prioritize transit when we want to. It also showed that it's time to repurpose empty parking lots that can be better used to meet the times that we face now.

Friendship Heights needs more housing and new businesses that will inject social and economic vitality into the neighborhood. Act supports the rezonings to the commercial residential zone for properties that need flexibility to adapt. A great example of this potential is the former Saks Fifth Avenue parking lot.

Montgomery County passed the 520-50 general plan with a goal of housing for all and doing it through infill housing near transit. The eyesore Saks Fifth Avenue parking lot is a perfect example of what 520-50 was intended to do. This is a parking lot that right now is not producing much of anything other than heat.

It doesn't produce any revenue. It is a much better idea to turn it into a mixed-use development because as many people as possible should be able to enjoy the financial health and environmental benefits of living near major transit infrastructure. That parking lot is within walking distance of the friendship heights metro station.

Now making sure that this area is opened up to as many residents as possible to enjoy living there does require building heights that matches what's across the street from that parking lot. This county is suffering through a housing shortage because we make it illegal to build too much we make it illegal on too much of our land to build something other than one home on one parcel of land. Limiting building heights to reduce density to fit in with the luxury neighborhood next door will continue the practice of exclusionary zoning that led to the housing shortage and yes poverty for far too many people.

The people who get priced out of friendship heights don't disappear. They end up going somewhere else and usually those are neighborhoods already suffering from people being priced out and displacement. Simply put it's not a fair public policy choice to exclude at the expense of anyone who wasn't lucky enough to secure housing in an era of lower prices or already have generational wealth.

It will also mean more people living far from transit because they choose to drive. Now that's an environmental choice our county cannot afford anymore because of the impacts of climate change and air pollution and microplastics that end up in our water from car tires. A better and I would argue a more humane option is to allow housing closer and where there is a lot of demand near housing.

Now since I'm on transportation I have to say a study is not needed to know that Montgomery County should be repurposing its pavement for transit priority. Friendship

Heights is a neighborhood built near transit that means we know we need to repurpose lanes. Another study assumes people riding a bus cause congestion.

Bus riders do not cause congestion. Too many cars on the road cause congestion. Too many cars on the is a consequence of not providing enough transit options.

A consequence of not providing enough safe routes to walk to transit or to walk to retail or to walk to housing or to bike to those places too. So I would ask you humbly please don't call for another study because the study is not what we need. Studies is what we have an abundance of already.

I will also like to draw the planning board's attention to the bus rapid transit section of the sector plan. Bus rapid transit yes is a good idea however it is years in the making and adding two more stations to the MD 355 BRT route that's in this study quite frankly is not a solution that's possibly even available in the next five to ten years. Now I know these sector plans need to look far out into the future but I would ask the planning board to include a section as you did in the New Hampshire Avenue BRT study to request that more money is needed for the bus priority program for interim bus improvements now.

If you want people out of cars and you want them to walk around the neighborhood give them options sooner rather than later. So I want to conclude by saying as I said at the top this is a neighborhood that needs a new injection of vitality and that comes from adapting properties and roads that were built in an era that Montgomery County already decided to leave behind. We have 520 50.

We have the pedestrian master plan. We have the bicycle master plan. We have the climate action plan.

All the all these plans tell you you've overbuilt roads. You've underbuilt housing. How many more plans do we need to pass to start getting on with the job that we need to do to reduce our housing shortage and to provide our present residents with the transit options they need so they can walk, bike, enroll safely to transit to housing and to new businesses.

Thank you for your time. Thank you so much. Next will be Tino Calabria.

Where's the button? I think it's already on sir. Oh it's on? Yeah. Okay.

I really enjoyed the last two speakers and welcome to James Hendrick. I hope that you can withstand the headwinds. I'm Tino Calabria, 30 plus years of Friendship Heights homeowner.

My wife and I engaged in work sessions led by Atar Margulies team during their years developing your sector plan. As an eight-year New York planner, guest lecturer at Columbia's planning school, the new school, and elsewhere, and having retired from HUD's Washington headquarters after 15 plus years, I applaud the draft. Chair of a group of volunteers chartered to advise WMATA, the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority, my almost 10 years experience there makes me appreciate the transit benefits enjoyed by Friendship Heights Marylanders.

Unfortunately, the draft had to acknowledge this. Friendship Heights experienced, quote, limited housing development over the past two decades, unquote. Fortunately, that's changing.

Encourage me to write the essay that's attached to the testimony I sent before. I might mention that in an updated version, the essay will be published in the online magazine Greater, Greater Washington, and I'll forward it upon the publication. Near my Willard Avenue home, developer EYA plans 520 housing units on GEICO's 26.5-acre site, including affordable housing for some forced to travel from afar to jobs in Friendship Heights.

Sites elsewhere are becoming available for similar development. Across Willard from my front door is the Reynolds House, unanimously approved for historic designation by the Historic Preservation Commission. Please consult the commission before you vote on the Reynolds House.

Thank you very much. Thank you so much. And next is Dawn Colabia.

Thank you. It's a pleasure to appear before the planning board, and thank you for having this hearing at a convenient place. I'm Dawn Colabia, as you said, Tino's wife, 30-plus years resident of Willard Avenue in Friendship Heights.

Yes, certainly. As we heard from the multiple testimonies today, there's been a lot of support for the notion of increased housing and attention to other issues in the community, environment, transportation, but also concerns about what those things translate to. I'm here today to talk a little bit about the history section of the report, which is an excellent study on the history of Friendship Heights, and I would commend the staff and the Historic Preservation Commission for their efforts to do that.

I'm here also to urge the adoption of the recommendation from the Historic Preservation Commission to designate the Reynolds House as a historic property. Edwin Reynolds was responsible for drawing the plats for West Friendship and for mapping Willard Avenue Park. We live across the street directly from the Reynolds House.

We see it every morning and every night. The history of that house and the family, the Salin family who led the way in coming into Friendship Heights, is inspiring. It's the story of an integration of a veteran, a wounded veteran returning and taking up residence as an immigrant family, and the life that they made for themselves and their children in this community, and the fact that many of their descendants still actually live in the Friendship Heights area.

It's a story about integration and making a community work, and it's also a story about the importance that transportation and roads makes, as the previous speakers have all indicated. At the house, of course, it faces Willard Avenue, but it faces River Road because that was the major artery at the time and also was the easiest way to get into the District of Columbia, which has always been important for residents of Montgomery County. It also is the home, the Reynolds House, is part of the property that was taken by the Glen Echo Railroad to be able to have its operations and other railroads in the community.

While they didn't last for a long time, those railroads had a significant impact on the population in Friendship Heights since it allowed them to get to both Tenley Circle and also further into Wisconsin Circle. It's interesting that the house is still on its original site in the way it has side yards and a front yard, and some people call it the backyard of Friendship Heights. It's a heavily wooded park, which is a surprise when you walk across the street, and you go in, and it's quiet.

It's an oasis. It's almost eerie. There's a stream, and we know it's connected to Little Falls Park, and the work that the volunteers, weed whackers, weed warriors, they call themselves, led by our own Sarah Morris from Little Falls Watershed Alliance, has done a remarkable job of improving the park and taking out invasive species, vines the size of your wrist, trees that provided no benefits to the community or to the wildlife.

I want to commend the work of those volunteers, many of which are part of our association on that effort and also in their efforts to check the fecal count in the streams. Some things we'd also recommend, which have to do with the Reynolds House, is we recommend that the park itself be zoned so that it is a natural space and it be removed from its designation of 35 feet height, etc. We also think that the side yard at the Reynolds House could be used as a park facility, which would allow for community gardens, possibly benches, seating areas, tables and chairs, and also that some landscaping could be done.

Interpretive signs posted so that we have things to show children and explain the story of this remarkable family and this remarkable house and the history of our community. Remembering the past sometimes is extremely important for planning for the future. And I commend the board for its efforts to move on these issues and for the work that's being done to improve the whole design and signing process for new developments, your modified expedited processing, where you've cut time that it takes to process applications from 150 days to 65 days.

That's an amazing efficiency if that actually happens, but I commend you for those efforts and also for your efforts to develop, hopefully with the support of the county council, deeper amounts of affordable housing and affordable at a more significant level than currently. These 90 plus units are a good start, but the need of the county is amazing. And unfortunately, current events in the United States and the history of social welfare programs and housing and public support for transportation and mass transit, unfortunately are not in their best period.

So I commend you for your efforts. I also commend the staff of the planning department for their outreach efforts, which works in our experience extraordinary and very well and very cleverly done to try to reach as many people as possible so they can understand that they too have a stake in the community, whether they're a renter, a visitor, or a resident of a condo or an apartment. I thank you for this opportunity and I commend you for your attention and for please support the designation of the historic property in the registry.

It's important for the future. Thank you. Thank you so much.

And next will be Michael Ochoa. Good evening, Chair Harris and commissioners. My name is Manuel Ochoa.

I am a resident of the Brookdale neighborhood and have lived in Friendship Heights since 2011. I'm also an urban planner and a small business owner with a home office in the neighborhood. I strongly support the overall direction of the draft Friendship Heights sector plan.

This is an important opportunity to guide the next generation of development in Friendship Heights and to transform what has become a collection of large, relatively disconnected properties into a more cohesive, walkable, mixed-use urban district. I am pleased that the plan has carefully considered many of the shortcomings in density, urban design, and walkability. One of the characteristics of the plan that I appreciate is the transition between the main thoroughfares like Wisconsin Avenue and adjacent neighborhoods like Brookdale.

I encourage more details in the plan that promote walkability and connectivity. Friendship Heights is a metro strong neighborhood, major destinations, and significant redevelopment opportunities. As the draft plan highlights, what the area lacks is a sufficiently connected public realm.

I appreciate the draft plan's attempt to encourage new pedestrian-oriented streets such as at the collection, improve pedestrian crossings, and a finer-grained network of streets and sidewalks. I also support policies in the draft plan to improve streets such as Wisconsin Avenue, Western, and Willard Avenue so that they function as complete streets and not simply transportation corridors for cars. Secondly, I support the plan's emphasis on urban design and transitions.

I support the draft plan's call for additional density, especially near metro. And while the plan calls for additional active ground floor retail and greater tree canopy and improved streetscapes, past efforts have fallen short. The plan should encourage smaller retail spaces with cheaper rents that can attract smaller micro-businesses.

We are missing many of the neighborhoods serving retail businesses, family-owned restaurants, and services that make a commercial district unique and interesting. Third, redevelopment should create a genuine network of parks and public spaces. Public open space should not be treated as leftover space between buildings, and I support the draft plan's call for a more connected system of parks, plazas, and greenways.

I also support the draft plan's recommendations for clear urban design standards and a design advisory panel. As it's been noted, existing plazas and open spaces often fall short in small and large ways that could promote greater walkability and vitality. Finally, I strongly support the plan's historic designation of the Reynolds House.

The Reynolds House is an important feature and focal point in Willard Avenue Neighborhood Park. I'll skip the history part since I have 10 seconds left. County parks should also consider other uses in the future, such as community space, a small business incubator, artist studio with a public component, as well as a community garden.

In other words, the historic home should be used as an opportunity to build community. So we have opportunity to create Friendship Heights as a more walkable and connected and better designed and distinctive place while preserving the historic resources. I encourage

the planning board to build on the work of the draft plan by building on the proposed recommendations and eventually adopt the draft plan.

Thank you. Thank you so much. We'll go with our last group.

So did Michael Aloha come in? So why don't we have Sandra Yula, Jake Goodman, Robert Cope, James Thurston, and James Curtin. So Ms. Yula, why don't you begin? Thank you. Thank you.

Hi everybody. I'm I'm Sandra Yula. I've lived opposite GEICO in your Willard Avenue Neighborhood Park and the Edward C. and Julia Reynolds House for 32 years.

And I worked for, as a planner, for 22 of those years at the Montgomery Planning Department, first in zoning and then for the last 12 years in historic preservation, retiring in 2019 while preparing the plan area history for the 2015 West Part Sector Plan. I learned about the Friendship Heights Sector Plan area. For more detailed comments, please see my written testimony.

I make the following requests regarding the Reynolds House and the sector plan generally. Reynolds House. Recommend historic designation of the Reynolds House at 5320 Willard Avenue with the three parcel environmental settings shown in Work with Parks Planning and the County Council to make the designation sustainable.

Support maintaining the house and residential use, which is the safest for the park and the house and most fiscally feasible. Recognize the many, many public interest factors that support designation. The Reynolds House has high functional significance in the park.

It provides eyes on the park. It's highly visible from the park trail and public sidewalk and thus ripe for interpretation. It adds to the essential character of the park as a shared backyard.

It protects a quiet stream valley experience in this park. The Reynolds House has high historic significance as beautifully described in the HPC staff info in Appendix E. The Reynolds House is our neighborhood's connection to Clara Barton. Per Miss Barton's diaries, Mr. Reynolds surveyed her Glen Echo property, which is now a National Historic Landmark and site, while she was converting a warehouse to both her home and the American Red Cross headquarters and he installed at her request a doorbell and electric call bells and wiring.

The Reynolds House is our neighborhood's connection to Chevy Chase Village, a Montgomery County Historic District and nationwide model for suburban planning. Mr. Reynolds was the surveyor who prepared the plot for Chevy Chase Village and he worked in the engineering core for Chevy Chase. The Reynolds House has hyper-local significance.

Mr. Reynolds was the surveyor who prepared the plot for West Friendship, the subdivision on Willard Avenue near the park, and he lived right adjacent to it. We need your help protecting our local history since we've lost so much of it in recent years. The Had Stewart Lane House, an early modernist house in the park, was raised.

Geico, a mid-century icon, is being raised now. The Joseph Piles House in the village of Friendship Heights was not designated recently and only half of the Isaac Shoemaker Cemetery in Brookdale made it on the burial site's inventory and now is the subject of a site plan application, even though this half was shown on tax maps for decades as part of a burial lot. Recognize it's not unusual for the property's historic and functional significance to become apparent only after the passage of time and it's appropriate to adapt park plans responsibly.

I have many comments about the plan generally. I recommend an urban park at the corner of Western and Friendship Boulevard. No dog parks in the Willard Avenue park or on the private open space on Geico at this end of Willard Avenue.

Add plantings to the park. Ma'am, can you wrap up your presentation? I'm almost finished, thank you. Review plan improvements along Willard Avenue near 4701 because I think there's going to be conflict.

There's a lot going on on that street. Don't close off Wisconsin Circle. It's a vital, vital connection for our neighborhood to Western.

Maintain the collection generally for neighborhoods serving commercial and retail and try to get marquees at that shopping center because nobody knows what's there. Maybe the signage rules need to be changed so propose a text amendment. And finally, encourage adaptive reuse of the handsome Sachs building which was not evaluated for historic designation.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you so much.

Next is Dave Goodman. Good evening Chair Harris and members of the Montgomery County Planning Board. My name is Jake M. Goodman.

I serve on the Board of Action Committee for Transit and on the Montgomery for All Steering Committee but I'm here speaking individually. In favorable with amendments to this plan. The plan all around of the Friendship Heights sector plan looks very good.

I appreciate the effort you have put into trying to make the Saks Fifth Avenue property parking lots and the parking lots at the former GEICO campus a more denser develop and the GEICO campus a more denser development. One thing I would say though with those is you know give I am someone who really is passionate about transit housing but also ensure but also sustainability and I think it would be very sustainable to turn the actual GEICO headquarters into apartments into condos reuse that building you know keep it in it keep the exterior but turn it in and repurpose it. Same thing with the Saks Fifth Avenue building repurpose it.

We need more housing so in addition to building more newer dense infill in those lots repurpose the existing structures so you can preserve them because the architecture is kind of significant. But anyway I also think what we again about this plan I well we you know I think the bus transit thing may sound okay but we need right now more than ever to echo my colleague Mike Larkin we need more bus frequency in the area right now and we need more accessibility features right now. There are still some stops even in this neighborhood

not in the urban part but in the more residential parts that where this bus stop is a signpole in the grass that is unacceptable.

There needs to be more thought into that and quite frankly we really as part of this plan there needs to be a lot of accessibility and thought and sustainability thought put into it and I'm actually happy to you know consult with you guys on this. I just want you to have like when you hire consultants for the you know construction and the review and you know next steps you need to have people who actually have lived experience with disability you know nothing about us without us. I have a rare vision impairment and I take public transit to get around so on top of that I would recommend just getting it done with the density the housing we need more housing we need more affordable housing more MPDUs in this environment and certainly it's been studied enough just get it done thank you.

Thank you for coming out tonight and thank you for your comments so next is Robert Cope. Good evening my name is Robert Cope I've lived in Brookdale for 50 years. What I want to suggest to you tonight is you turn off the computers you close the sector plan maybe you take planning 101 and throw it out the window and just think about what we're doing.

So I want to address three points with that you don't need everything to just talk about this the ball field the ball fields up at Friendship in Western the plan suggests a half an acre it needs to be bigger the plan suggests a dog park we don't need a dog park we need green space we need fields for the kids to play on. Secondly townhouses owning on the Geico lot that lot those areas those townhouses are currently zoned R60 TDR with 50 feet high. The sector plan suggests raising it to 100 feet but there's going to be transition with all due respect planning board doesn't do good with transition I mean you just don't so set it out more specifically Friendship Boulevard keep in mind and I went on Google Earth to check the elevation and at Willard and Friendship Boulevard there's an elevation at Willard at Friendship Boulevard and Western it's 45 feet higher so the same height should not be along that extension you need to put into the plan that the heights are reduced as you come up Friendship Boulevard that's what I'm suggesting and finally I want to suggest that we take the ballpark we take the green space we connect it to the greenway and it comes in and it hooks into Brookdale and then it goes down to Western Willard Avenue that needs to be a park POPs is great POPs is in planning 101 we don't need POPs we need a park and we need the county to own that park and to take care of that park finally 250 feet at Wisconsin and Western it's going to stick out like a sore thumb I mean just think about 250 feet when everything else is is up there is about 12 12 stories I think the Archstone apartments are 12 or 13 stories 250 feet is going to stick out so these are just things that you can think about and things that you can do without all the paraphernalia that comes along with planning thank you thank you so much next is James Thurston good evening chair Harris and members of the planning board my name is James Thurston and today I want to ask you to send this working draft back to staff for additional work because it's major departures from the existing planning framework lack clear traceable planning judgments from the existing planning framework and visible accounting of community input I'm the chair of the Willoughby condominiums neighborhood development committee the Willoughby as you you have probably heard is the largest condominium in the in friendship village we face three different opportunity zones and sit directly across from two of them the former Geico site and parcel four our board established this committee at the Willoughby to keep our community informed and engaged in this process and we have been we've been

participating for months we genuinely genuinely genuinely believed that we were helping to shape the future of friendship heights our community we invested heavily because planning staff told the community that our participation would shape the working draft we met with staff we attended every single forum we submitted detailed comments and we delivered to you the board petitions with nearly a thousand signatures on them from our community the Willoughby planning staff worked hard they treated residents respectfully and we really appreciate those efforts of Tara and Elsa and Larissa we share the working drafts ambitions for housing economic vitality environmental stewardship in a more inclusive friendship heights those goals are not abstract to my family my husband grew up in MPDU housing in Montgomery County his Haitian immigrant parents moved their young family decades ago from DC to Montgomery County and so and his mother and sister still live in that same home we now live in the Willoughby our disagreement isn't with with growth or affordable housing or diversity or economic vitality our disagreement is with the planning judgments in this working draft and the judgments that this draft uses to pursue those goals you asked residents to be specific constructive and solutions oriented the Willoughby community has worked to ensure that our more than 30 page contribution to you submitted separately applies that standard to the GEICO site parcel four and the working drafts departures from the 1998 sector plan and its binding elements in each case we identify the problem propose a solution and explain how that solution preserves a more balanced planning framework just a few examples from our submission specifically some changes to the draft we ask for our for parcel four retain the 90 foot height limit rather than increasing it to 150 feet and establish a 75 foot street facing height limit consistent with the adjacent parcel six the working draft provides detailed measurable compatibility standards for the Brookdale and Chevy Chase village frontages fantastic and we ask you to apply that same rigor to the Willard Avenue and Friendship Boulevard frontages of the GEICO site and better reflect again the the planning direction established in the 1998 sector plan for parcel four restore the just over one acre of open space make its location on the existing lawn binding rather than illustrative and preserve the existing mature trees for the former GEICO site revise the recommended building height so they better reflect the planning direction established in the 1998 sector plan those heights were and remain appropriate and they still reflect actual community input to attract more families the draft must also plan for the parks recreation spaces and community infrastructure they will need that includes we think a publicly accessible neighborhood children's play area at parcel four and stronger planning for parks and green spaces at both parcel four in the former GEICO site where existing and future residents actually live these are not abstract principles these are specific edits along with others in our written submission that the board can direct staff to make before adopting a plan they also align with the recommendations from other community organizations and with the planning direction established in the 1998 sector plan and its binding elements if you think back in school we all sort of learned to to show our work when solving complex math problems the willoughby in the broader sector community we've shown our work show us how community planning needs to do the same show your work show us how the community input shaped your recommendations why the 1998 balance no longer works and why these departures will create a better community show us it's not in the work in draft the greater departure from the 1998 sector plan and related elements the greater the obligation you have to explain the judgment supporting it extraordinary departures deserve extraordinary explanations we're not seeing them this working draft does not meet that bar friendship heights is already one of the most densely populated communities in the region

the 1998 sector plan already accommodates substantial additional growth and density this board just approved hundreds of new units on the GEICO site under that framework so it allows for more density we're not against density yet this working draft pushes well beyond even that framework the county executive and several county agencies have questioned the assumptions underlying this amount of additional density so do we capacity asks whether we can build something good planning judgment asks whether we should build something density is not a substitute for good planning the question before you is not simply how much friendship heights should grow it's whether this working draft demonstrates that those planning judgments will produce a better friendship heights we don't think this working draft will so in conclusion friendship heights deserves a sector plan that matches ambitious goals which this plan has but with rigorous transparent planning judgment that incorporates community input in a traceable way it's obvious you don't do that yet for those reasons we ask the planning board to send this working draft back to staff direct staff to adopt the specific requests in our written submission and wherever the revised draft departs substantively from the strong existing sector plan explain specifically that's what was asked of us explain specifically how that the evidence the community input in the planning judgment support that departure from the 98 plan thank you thank you thank you so much for your time and last but not least james james curtain thank you well i may be least but i'm definitely last i guess so i i had a uh you know i have testimony i've submitted it you can read it there i'm not going to read it tonight um but i am going to say a few things based on a few things i've heard from other speakers and just reflections that have occurred to me um i guess i'm one of the uh old white um over-educated and uh wish i were more affluent residents of friendship heights uh at least that's the way the demographic section of the planning document seems to characterize us i live in the willoughby apartment building and i can assure you that the willoughby apartment building is not full of just old white rich over-educated people it is an incredibly diverse community of probably 2 000 existing residents of friendship heights and my guess is that that diversity is matched in the other three condominium buildings in the village of friendship heights and the other four rental buildings in friendship heights apartment values in our condominium building it's my understanding range from about 200 000 for the smaller units to about 600 000 for the larger units which i believe based on information we've received from eya who's developing across the street at geico is well below the costs that they're going to charge people for their quote affordable townhouses and condominiums in those brand new buildings so our building and all the other buildings in friendship heights really are existing affordable housing um does michael county need more housing sure uh can friendship heights support more housing sure but don't throw the baby out with the bath water um you know i heard an earlier speaker sort of observe or complain that too much of montgomery county um is zoned so that it excludes people because of lot size and single family usage uh well that may be true um and it may be true in some of the neighborhoods directly adjacent to the village of friendship heights but it's certainly not true of the village and it doesn't seem reasonable or fair to me as a resident of the village to try to solve that broader problem by adding four five six more 15 20 story high-rise apartment buildings and commercial buildings into our existing neighborhood um that that's just not fair um i'm not even sure that we can support that kind of residential growth in friendship heights certainly not without all the concomitant other problems that it would bring in terms of traffic etc so think very carefully about what you as a board are doing here um keep the height limits reasonable i think what eya is doing at the geico site um you know six seven stories that feels a lot more reasonable

to me than 15 and 20 stories uh the neighborhood did that years ago none of us built those buildings we're happy to live in them but let's not repeat that mistake and uh as a closing remark let me just second what everybody else is saying about preserving existing trees and green space that is if you could do anything to help the existing and future residents of friendship heights it would be a spacious open and green space thank you thank you thank you and thank everyone i want to end by saying thank everyone for coming out tonight uh this ends our public testimony on the sector plan uh we really appreciate as i said before your your thoughts on the sector plan and coming out and providing your public testimony so we'll begin our work sessions in a couple three weeks and um also i want to thank the staff the commission staff the legal staff the planning staff for making this happen tonight so thank you have a safe trip home and we will see you soon thank you