

## [Is Gaithersburg West a Sleeping Giant? Part Two](#)

The Gaithersburg West Master Plan has provoked strong views in support and in opposition. Let's examine both sides.

The supporters' principal case for the plan can be summarized in one word: jobs. The Life Sciences Center (LSC) is currently allowed to have enough space to hold 38,000 jobs, of which 21,200 already exist and another 9,350 would be created under approved site plans. The new plan would allow enough commercial space to create 60,000 jobs. The county has an undeniable interest in creating jobs, and not just because of the current recession. The hard fact is that without job creation over the long run, the county will not be able to afford good schools and high-quality services. Over time, a county without job growth will turn into a county without a future.

Furthermore, Johns Hopkins has argued in an [MPW guest blog](#) that the plan's diversification of uses will be good for existing and future residents. Hopkins states, "The new Gaithersburg West Master Plan would transform this single-use, commercial area, filled with low-rise office parks and acres of surface parking lots, into a vibrant town center that feels more like a community." They state that 45% of the Belward Farm lot will be set aside for parks and open space, which they say is an improvement over the current plan's set-aside of 25%. Finally, they say that building on the science-based community already in the plan area will help the county "remain competitive as a global center for scientific research."

The opponents fall into two camps. First, some smart growth advocates such as [Action Committee for Transit](#) argue that the plan is not transit-oriented development and is in fact equivalent to sprawl. They say that the plan's failure to explicitly call for a light-rail CCT means that transit options in the area will be little better than bus service. They believe that the plan's assumptions of carpool and transit use are overly optimistic. Finally, they criticize the plan's street network as focused on moving cars at high speeds at the expense of pedestrians. The Sierra Club agrees and has [announced its intention](#) to score County Council votes on the plan in its endorsement process.

The second group of opponents is far larger: the neighbors. Many nearby civic groups have formed the Gaithersburg-North Potomac-Rockville Coalition, better known as "[Scale it Back](#)," an organization with a simple goal of reducing plan density. They have submitted two [guest blogs](#) to MPW saying that the plan calls for "monstrous high rises" and "hopelessly clogged" traffic. The neighbors were able to mobilize hundreds of people to attend a March 9 community meeting with the four at-large County Council Members. Delegate Saqib Ali (D-39), a plan [skeptic](#), took this photo of the meeting.



The opponents are carrying the day in the eyes of two important groups of elected officials: the City Councils of Gaithersburg and Rockville. Each wrote a letter to the County Council criticizing many aspects of the master plan, with Gaithersburg's [measured but pointed comments](#) looking moderate compared to Rockville's [naked call](#) for the plan to be shelved.

But that is not all. The two City Councils held an unprecedented [joint meeting](#) with the County Council on March 1 that did not go well. In fact, one plan supporter went so far as to call it an "ambush." One City Council Member after another attacked the plan, feeding on both each other and the masses of opponents in attendance. One attendee described a "tremendous sense of tension in the room" characterized by a "hostility between the cities and the county." Another attendee described the county's reaction to municipal concerns as, "Screw the facts, screw the numbers, screw your sorry little traffic problem... talk to staff about it. Left us with a pretty bad taste." County Council Members Phil Andrews and Marc Elrich condemned the plan on multiple grounds and were not challenged by any of their colleagues who are more receptive to it.

We have our own opinion on the Gaithersburg West Master Plan. We will offer it tomorrow.

[Summary only...](#)

Posted by Adam Pagnucco at [7:00 AM](#) [0 comments](#)