

One of Largest Bio-Tech Science Centers in the Country Proposed for Belward Farm and Neighboring Areas

Johns Hopkins University (JHU) has proposed building one of the largest bio-tech centers in the country here in the North Potomac/Gaithersburg/Rockville area. Formally known as the Life Science Center, this "Science City" could include up to 20 million square feet of commercial, academic and residential development. This is more density than downtown Bethesda and National Institutes of Health, combined. Concerned communities and organizations like NPCA are excited about the prospect of a vibrant and world-class bio-tech center in the area. However, we oppose the traffic, overcrowding of schools, congestion and density that the proposed city would bring to the area. Fortunately, NPCA and other organizations have submitted viable alternatives that are being considered by county officials.

24/7 City Being Thrust Upon our Community

Science City would include the area roughly bordered by Key West Avenue, Great Seneca Highway, Shady Grove Road, Muddy Branch Road and Darnestown Road. The Montgomery County Planning Board has drafted a new Master Plan (the Plan) for Belward and nearby properties. The Plan would transform the pastoral setting of Belward Farm into a dense city with some of the tallest buildings in all of Montgomery County.

The density would be similar to that of Rosslyn, VA. For example, the Plan would permit several 12-14 story high-rises on Belward along with a greater number of 5-7 story buildings. The draft Plan also provides for 300 multilevel housing units and extensive retail. All this construction would bring at least an additional 16,000 workers and residents to Belward alone. Some of this construction is planned to be completed before adequate schools and infrastructure will be in place.

The draft Plan also proposes zoning changes to build up to 5,000 new housing units at the current Public Services Training Academy, located between Key West Avenue and Darnestown Road. The number of housing units is likely to negatively impact our schools.

Traffic Congestion: If you think local traffic is bad now, just wait...

Muddy Branch Rd, Seneca Hwy, and Darnestown Rd will be widened to six lanes around Belward Farm. Key West Ave will be widened to eight lanes. Five grade-separated interchanges similar to those on Route 29 near the Montgomery Auto Sales Park in White Oak will be built at intersections around the "Science City". Planners have not yet estimated the number of cars - and the inevitable gridlock - that will arrive with the city. One estimate places 40,000 additional cars on our local roads. The Life Science Center is an exciting concept. However, we believe it must be compatible with surrounding residential neighborhoods, schools, the environment and our already congested roadways.

Reasonable Alternatives Exist

Fortunately, concerned citizens and organizations such as NPCA, the Sierra Club, Residents for Reasonable Development, and the Gaithersburg – North Potomac – Rockville Coalition, have developed alternatives to the draft Plan. These plans allow significant growth and expansion without such detrimental impacts on the existing communities. The alternatives are based on smart-growth principles, larger buffer zones around Belward, lower densities, less housing, and various transportation-related ideas to improve traffic flow.

Specifically, the groups are collectively advocating for:

- 1) Developing Belward Farm that preserves the character of 100-year old farm.
- 2) Reducing proposed commercial space to limit traffic congestion.
- 3) Reducing the amount of proposed housing units to alleviate overcrowded schools.
- 4) Linking the timing of infrastructure and school improvements to coincide with the development process.

County planners are currently reviewing these alternatives.

Help Shape the Future of Our Community

Plans are being reviewed and elected officials will be casting votes and making decisions in the early fall. Now is the time to get involved. Let NPCA or any of the other organizations listed below know how you feel about Science City. More importantly, write or visit members of the Montgomery County Council and the Montgomery County Planning Board, and tell them what you like and dislike about Science City. Contact Montgomery County Council President Phil Andrews and the County Council at <http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/Council> The Planning Board may be reached at <http://www.mc-mncppc.org/>

For more detailed information please see our "North Potomac News" page at www.northpotomacnews.org. There is additional information available from two other organizations that are working hard to balance the needs of our collective community and JHU's development plans - www.reasonabledevelopment.info, and the Gaithersburg - North Potomac - Rockville Coalition: Donna Baron at baron234@comcast.net