

Good Afternoon.

For the record, my name is Michelle Layton. Along with Ms. Donna Selden, I co-chair the Sandy Spring Ashton Rural Preservation Consortium. I live at 17905 Ednor View Terrace, which is 2 miles from the Ashton Village Center and about 3 miles from the Sandy Spring Village Center.

As our name implies, the SSARPC's mission is to support development in Ashton and Sandy Spring that conforms to the 1998 Ashton/Sandy Spring Master Plan, in order to preserve the historic rural villages that Ashton and Sandy Spring are. We are, in fact, Pro-Master Plan, not anti development.

It is the belief of the SSARPC that the Development Plan for the Thomas Building in Sandy Spring, sitting at the edge of the historic district and at the entryway to the village, is out of character with Sandy Spring in terms of the size and massing of the buildings, as well as the parking deck, which would almost quadruple the amount of parking currently there. These structures would occupy most of the available site.

We believe, too, that the proposed plan for the Thomas building is not consistent with the Rural Overlay Zone because it does not meet the purpose clause of the Zone. Nor is the plan in conformance with the 1998 Sandy Spring/Ashton Master Plan.

We disagree with the Staff Report on page 13 that the plan, "would be consistent with the design characteristics of the existing developments within the Sandy Spring Historic District and the rural village overlay zone in terms of massing, architecture and height of the proposed building."

The Staff Report (pp.19-20) also suggests that at the time of Site Plan review, the elements of the façade of the building will be examined for consistency with the Master Plan. Our concern is that the massing currently proposed in the Development Plan Amendment cannot be "fixed" at Site Plan by façade detailing alone and that requiring the building to be smaller would certainly be a start.

We understand that at this stage of the review process, the Board must make a finding of consistency with the zoning, compliance with the Master Plan and compatibility with the existing and future land uses in the surrounding area in order to approve this plan as submitted. On that note, we believe that the proposal fails on all three counts.

First, the plan is not consistent with the purpose clause of the Rural Village Overlay Zone, which is to:

(a) Preserve and enhance the rural village character of the Sandy Spring and Ashton Village centers by ensuring an attractive and traditional pattern of houses, commercial establishments, open spaces and their relationship to the roadways.

and

(b) Encourage a compatible relationship between new or expanded houses or businesses and traditional neighboring structures that reflect the best of local village character particularly in term of scale, siting, design features and orientation of the site.

The proposed plan does not ensure the right pattern The buildings are too massive and do not fit into the existing traditional architecture. In no way does a three-story building with a parking structure that runs the entire underground of the site meet the existing patterns.

Secondly, the plan does not comply with the Master Plan. There are several places in the Staff Report that say that the Thomas Building is in compliance with the Master Plan, but it fails to show that and actually uses language that shows the intent of the Master Plan.

Page 12 of the Staff report states that the Master Plan emphasizes rural villages as an important element of rural character in Sandy Spring. It discusses how “new development should maintain the small scale envisioned for a village center.” It also references active fronts, traditional village design and the use of the Sandy Spring Historic District as a source for design.

True, the MP calls for these elements, but we do not see how a three-story structure with a parking garage with 296 spaces assures that, “new development maintains the small scale envisioned for a village center.”

Likewise, page 26 of the Staff Report specifically says, “The massing of the building should be designed to reduce the building’s apparent size in order to make it more compatible with the scale of the smaller buildings in the area.”

The Master Plan consistently uses language like “rural villages,” “small scale village design,” and in terms of the entryway to Sandy Spring, “entrances to the village center that should help to establish the character of the area.” (p.29)

The Thomas Building will be the first building that people come upon when entering the village of Sandy Spring. It sits exactly at the west entryway. We believe that it establishes the opposite character that is described in the Master Plan.

This massive three- story structure with its parking garage does not set the tone that one would hope to see or even imagine in a historic village. One could argue that historic towns like Annapolis and Ellicott City have large parking structures and parking lots, but Sandy Spring, while historic, is not, by any means, Annapolis or Ellicott City.

The Design Guidelines (p. 36) in the Master Plan address the entryways as well. It notes the need to

- Preserve the rural entry experience along MD 108, Brooke Road and Norwood and Dr. Bird Road and to
- Provide the critical rural setting for the Sandy Spring Village center right at the edge of the village.

This entryway building, does not, as submitted, preserve any rural experience that is called for in both the 1980 and 1998 Master Plans.

Finally, the proposal is not compatible with the existing land uses around it. Businesses are small in Sandy Spring. Buildings are small in Sandy Spring and for all of the reasons already noted; the Thomas Building does not fit the descriptions of small rural village from the Overlay Zone or the Master Plan. A comparison could be made to the size of the Moore and Bentley Buildings, but those buildings, built as two separate buildings, are not at the entryway to this village nor can one see them from the road. One must turn onto Meeting House Road to see the size and architecture of those buildings.

The very first sentence of the 1998 Sandy Spring /Ashton Master Plan revisits a sentence from the 1980 Master Plan. It reads, “The Plan shows in detail land use, transportation systems, community resources and zoning and represents the strong desire of the community to remain rural.”

The second sentence of the 1998 Master Plan reads, “The community’s commitment to preserve the area’s rural character is as strong today as it was 15 years ago.” Finally, the 3rd sentence reads, “This Plan- the 1998 Master Plan- continues the 1980 Plan’s emphasis on maintaining the aesthetic qualities and rural character of Sandy Spring/Ashton.”

28 years ago, the Master Plan was written to keep this area rural. 10 years ago the Master Plan was re-written to keep Sandy Spring rural and that commitment is still just as strong for historic Sandy Spring and its village center today.

We recognize that the tenant, the Goddard School, and its requirements to run efficiently have determined the footprint for this building. Know that we understand that and welcome them to the area. We do however feel that the mass and scale of the building can be reduced to still honor those needs.

It is the hope of the SSARPC that the Board will not approve the Development Review Plan Amendment for the Thomas Building unless it is scaled back from what is currently proposed to reflect traditional small-scale village design that is called for in the Master Plan and respects the purpose clause of the Rural Overlay Zone.

Thank you.