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via Email

January 7, 2009

Mr. Royce Hanson, Chair
Mr. Neil Braunstein, Staff, Preliminary Plan
Montgomery County Planning Board
Maryland National Park & Planning Commission
8787 Georgia Avenue
Silver Spring, MD 20910

Dear Messrs. Hanson and Braunstein:

re: ezStorage Facility in Sandy Spring, MD (Case # 120080410)

I am a member of the Bancroft of Sandy Spring Homeowners Association for six years and have been and am very active in community issues. I was first introduced to the Planning Board in October 2005 when I testified on behalf of the Sandy Spring Civic Association to request budgetary considerations for issues concerning safety and transportation, traffic planning, community input in the planning process, over-development in Sandy Spring considerations to include sidewalks and curbs and support for small business.

Early on, I was introduced to the 1998 Sandy Spring/Ashton Master Plan. This Master Plan was designed to provide a benchmark with regard to public policy. Specifically, it states that land use master plans should be referred to by public officials and private individuals when decisions are made that affect the use of land within the plan's boundaries. Although the specifics of a master plan may become less relevant as time goes on, this Master Plan is intended to convey a general sense of desirable future character rather than any specific commitment to a particular detailed design.

With this intent in mind, I am strongly **OPPOSED** to the construction of an ezStorage facility on Md Rte. 108 in downtown Sandy Spring. For years, a viable business, W-H Rental, ran profitably on this property until the landowner increased the lease payment and the rising cost of gas to operate machinery to the point where it was impossible for the business owners to continue to operate. W-H Rental is sadly missed by the residents of Highland, Ashton, Sandy Spring, and Olney. This business served the community for various purposes, including the rental of coffee percolators at the Sandy Spring Museum, linen rentals, tool rentals, power-washers, roto-tillers, etc. Personally, twice I rented a small, closed truck to bring home large purchases I made at Costco, a drill and power-washer. Most of the many people I know in this area also took advantage of this business.

Although storage facility use of C-2 zone is permitted on this property, it will neither serve the greater Sandy Spring community nor outlying areas. GOCA has said that, despite the targeted town of Olney, it does not see a benefit to the residents of Olney. This facility will not contribute to the needs of the community. I have work tirelessly with others in the community to revitalize the downtown, historic Sandy Spring and have realized many positive changes.

The Master Plan's vision is to preserve the character of Sandy Spring/Ashton as an historic rural community which identifies five elements of rural character which define Sandy Spring/Ashton as a unique rural community: rural open space, rural traditions, rural neighborhoods, rural roads, and rural villages. One issue that has been taken very seriously by the Park & Planning Commission has shown to be **safety** through this unique community. Children walk daily to Sherwood High School, students walk to the 7-11 in Ashton after school, residents walk to the famous Sherwood Warriors football games. Patrons meet and greet friends while sitting outside the French Confection and can now **safely** walk to the Sandy Spring Store, the U.S. Post Office, or the Sandy Spring Bank to complete their errands of the morning or afternoon. Members of the Friends Meeting House can **safely** walk to their services on Meetinghouse Road. New residents in Meadowsweet can now **safely** exit onto Rte. 108 at Brooke Road with the help of the new, working traffic light. Sidewalks and storm drains have recently been installed to allow pedestrians to **safely** access downtown businesses.

We have overcome many obstacles and accomplished much with the help of Marilyn Praisner, Karen Montgomery, Peggy Erickson and the Mid-County Services Center. The buildings on the north side of Rte. 108 have been freshly painted and rotted wood and railings replaced. Five years ago, the former Montgomery Mutual Insurance Company building was vacant and remained vacant for many years. It is now completely occupied with businesses that operate 24 hours, 7 days/week.

It appears to me that the vision of the County Council and Advisory Board outlined in the Master Plan is slowly coming to fruition to make Sandy Spring and Ashton connected and a walkable, biking community where residents can come together. A 12,000 square foot storage facility, regardless of the architectural design, is still a huge business that will not bring any benefit to this area, including Olney. As stated by the representatives of ezStorage, Olney is a targeted area, within 3 miles of the proposed facility. GOCA has qualified that residents do not have a need of this type of business. With regard to the retail business of selling boxes and bubble wrap, Olney residents have multiple sources including CVS, Rite-Aid, UPS, Dollar Store, numerous large grocery stores. What would compel them to drive past Good Counsel to Sandy Spring to purchase these items?

The Master Plan emphasizes “rural villages” as one of the important elements of rural character in Sandy Spring/Ashton. The village centers provide for the business of daily life also. The rural character of the village centers is of great value to the community. There is concern about the future economic and social health of these village centers. This Plan acknowledges and addresses these issues to the extent possible through land use and design recommendations. (p. 29)

The rural entries along MD 108, Norwood/Dr. Bird Road, and Norwood Road separate the village centers from other nearby areas of settlement, such as the Olney Town Center and Cloverly. The entries create attractive entrances to the village centers and help **establish the character of the area**. These roads are lined with homes of varied vintage, scattered vistas of open cropland and fields, woodland, hedgerows and some of the area’s institutions. **The importance of the rural entry experience was recognized in the 1980 Plan and remains an important theme of this Plan.**

In light of the current economic recession, this sort of business is tied to people moving. With the current slump in residential and commercial real estate, the need for a storage facility does not exist; i.e., residents use this facility to move from one place to another; when no houses are selling and no one is moving, it does not support the community. The town has already fallen once in transition from agricultural to industrial in the 1960’s...until about 3 years ago. Today, there are advertised vacancies in the facility in Columbia, MD, 20 minutes away. If ezStorage in Sandy Spring is not profitable and ultimately deserted, Sandy Spring will be faced with another vacant structure that contributes to a “ghost town” façade. The potential is to kill the entire future of the community.

While realizing that this big business will bring a significant monetary contribution to the tax basis of Montgomery County, please do not disappoint the people who live in this area who have been contributing for decades dating back to the historic Quaker plantations and more recent landowners. Not sure, but I don’t think that ezStorage corporate is qualified to vote in Montgomery County elections, but the people who live here (increasing dramatically everyday) do! These are the constituents who have voted for you and you represent and protect. I know all of you take your positions very seriously and are intent on making decisions based on what is best for the historic preservation of such a unique area.

I hope you will listen to the many in the community who have written their concerns. We are very passionate about protecting the rural heritage of Sandy Spring and Ashton. We hope you will see past the disguise of a building, realize it’s use brings no benefit, and consider alternate businesses and uses that will more appropriately “fit” into this parcel that will contribute to serve the residents who live in the nearby areas. Thank you very much.

Sincerely,

Joanne M. O’Flynn