

**Testimony of Mark Feinroth Representing the Williamsburg Village Homeowners Association Regarding the July 2003 Staff Draft of the Proposed Olney Master Plan Amendments**

**September 25, 2003**

Mr. Chairman, Members of the Planning Board, my name is Mark Feinroth. I represent the Williamsburg Village Civic Association. Our community is located on the west side of Georgia Avenue south of Queen Mary Drive and north of Hines Road. We have approximately 400 homes in the neighborhood and we estimate more than 1,000 resident.

We are generally pleased with draft revisions to the Olney Master Plan and thank Khalid Afzal for his evident willingness to listen to the concerns of our neighborhood with respect to the town center issue and the Olney Elementary School site at Queen Mary Drive and Georgia Avenue. The recommendations we support are on page 51 of the staff draft and we recommend adding one additional recommendation.

The staff recommends exploring the opportunities for a civic center with retail, offices and public space within walking distance of the Georgia Avenue and Rt. 108 intersection and further recommends exploring the feasibility of the Olney Elementary School site as a location for the town center should the school no longer be needed for educational purposes. If the school site is used for the town center staff recommends preserving the existing ballfields. Within the text on page 50 of the draft, staff suggests that other sites should be explored as they become available.

There is no mention of what should become of the Olney Elementary School site if the town center is located on another site and later on the school is no longer needed for educational purposes. At its August 2003 meeting, GOCA adopted a resolution addressing this possibility that we believe should be incorporated into the Olney Master Plan Amendments. GOCA and Williamsburg Village support a fourth recommendation concerning the Olney Elementary School located at Queen Mary Drive and Georgia Avenue. In the event that the civic center/town commons facility is built on a site other than the Olney Elementary School parcel and at a later date the School is no longer needed for educational purposes, GOCA and Williamsburg Village supports development of the property as public green space such as a park or commons. GOCA and Williamsburg Village only support structures on the site that would be consistent with recreational uses.

The Olney Elementary School site is of critical importance to Olney and Williamsburg Village because it is the only recreational area with our community that is accessible without crossing a major road. It is also the only green space within a few blocks of the Georgia Avenue and Rt. 108 intersection. We believe that it is tremendously important to preserve that green space.

In retrospect, we were quite fortunate to read in the Gazette last November that Olney Elementary School was a possible site for the town center facility and that the school might be moved to another site. Our community reacted with alarm to that possibility and we quickly became involved in the GOCA Master Plan dialogue. In this age of electronic communications the Planning Board should carefully examine its communication technique in order to let neighborhoods know about plans under consideration that might impact critical facilities like parks and elementary schools. The Master Plan Advisory Group technique is an effective means to bring a small group of committed individuals together to collaborate on drafting a revised Master Plan but the Planning Board can not assume that the individuals who sit on the Advisory Group are always able to communicate with the individuals and neighborhoods who might have an interest in a given site or proposal. The Planning Board owes it to the citizens of Montgomery County to do a better job communicating.

Thank you for this opportunity to address you concerning the Olney Master Plan.

Submitted by

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