

September 21, 2004

**Testimony before the County Council Regarding:
Planning Board Recommendations Olney Master Plan**

**Presented by Nancy Wendt on Behalf of
The Olney Coalition**

President Silverman and members of the Council, good evening. My name is Nancy Wendt and I represent The Olney Coalition, an umbrella organization comprised of eight citizens associations and more than 2,000 households.

SUMMARY COMMENTS

The Olney Coalition strongly supports the stated objectives at the beginning of each chapter of the Planning Board Draft. We disagree that the land use and zoning actions recommended in the plan will achieve these objectives.

The most important results this master plan update needs to achieve are:

1. Conform to the General Plan vision of Olney as a satellite town: all commercial development is located in the Town Center surrounded by low-density semi-rural neighborhoods that provide a buffer between the suburban neighborhoods of the urban ring and the Agricultural Reserve.
2. Preserve the character of existing neighborhoods¹ through adherence to published zoning standards, and compatible design for all new and re-development projects.
3. Balance the capacity of public facilities with the density of development and the resulting expansion of Olney's population.
4. Provide a full range of housing choices to meet the needs of current and future residents². Provide choices in proportion to the total number of housing units in the planning area to prevent over concentration of any one type of housing.
5. Protect the sensitive environmental resources and watersheds that lie within the planning area.

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE 1980 MASTER PLAN

The Olney Master Plan is the document of "notice" for people who chose rent or buy homes in Olney. At closing, new owners must sign a statement that they have read their master plan and they accept the land use, zoning, and development decisions that have been made for their area. Expectations set by master plans cannot be ignored.

The 1980 Olney master plan set an expectation that the maximum build-out for Olney was 10,800 dwelling units. This number of dwelling units was expected to produce a maximum population of 31,600³. According to MNCPPC's 2003 Census update Olney's actual population in 2003 was 39,260.

¹ General Plan Refinement December 1993 p. 17

² General Plan Refinement December 1993 p. 48.

³ Olney Master Plan June 1980 p. 152.

How could the 1980 plan have been so far off? The TDR and MPDU programs changed everything. The TDR program, which was supposed to be density neutral, was modified so that TDR's from anywhere in the county could be used in Olney. MPDU bonuses of up to 22% on top of the TDR density increases that ranged from 2 to 8 times the prior zoning⁴ produced a significant planning gap. The end result is:

- ◆ Although Olney has only 3.6% of the county's housing, Olney has 34.3% of the TDRs and 8.2% of the County's MPDUs⁵.
- ◆ Olney has 2 HOC owned properties (Towne Centre and Pond Ridge) and HOC owns 139 of Olney's MPDUs.
- ◆ 23.7% of Olney's housing is now townhouses compared to the county average of 18%. Only Gaithersburg and Germantown have more.
- ◆ Olney has 417 elderly housing units on the ground (the combined total of Andrew Kim house, Marian Assisted Living, and Brooke Grove) and 500+ on the way (Brooke Grove plans to add 402 units and the approved Finneyfrock development will add another 100 units.) Leisure World, with 5,000 + units lies at the boundary of Olney and Aspen Hill planning areas. Friends House with 215 units lies at the boundary with Sandy Spring. 7.3% of Olney's population is over 65 compared to a countywide average of 12.2%⁶.
- ◆ Olney has the highest density of residential wedge communities⁷.

Planning Area	Dwelling Units / Acre
Olney	0.75
Eastern County	0.66
Potomac	0.50
Travilah	0.37
Goshen	0.33
Darnestown	0.33
Upper Rock Creek	0.30

How did this explosive growth affect area schools? Instead of the estimated 500 to 1,500 new students, countywide enrollment grew by 2,600 to 3,000 students per year. In Olney this required three new schools (Brooke Grove ES, Rosa Parks MS, Blake HS) and four major school additions. Despite census data shows that household size in Olney has been remarkably stable, we are told household size will decrease and school enrollments will fall. We are skeptical. This is especially true given the new housing that continues to attract young families to Olney and its adjacent planning areas. Most alarming is the fact that the Shady Grove sector plan expects help from adjacent planning areas to meet its school and recreational needs.

The bottom line is that development far exceeded 1980 forecasts, placing Olney in moratorium due to inadequate infrastructure. Last fall the present Council eliminated the AGP Policy Area

⁴ Olney Master Plan June 1980 p. 66

⁵ "Strengthening the Moderately Priced Dwelling Unit Program: A 30 Year Review" February 2004 p. 3-3

⁶ Planning Board Draft May 2004 p. 11.

⁷ January 20, 2004 County Council Staff Packet p. 12.

Review and lifted the moratorium without requiring any corrective action to close this gap before resuming development. This action guaranteed that Olney's infrastructure problems will persist. (For more detailed analysis of growth and unmet needs in Olney, see Appendix A.)

ISSUES THAT NEED TO BE ADDRESSED IN THE 2004-2005 MASTER PLAN

32 Acre County-owned Property on Bowie Mill Road – Given the limited number of school sites in Olney and in the mid-county area in total, we believe this site should be held in reserve to accommodate the significantly increased school age population that will result from the cumulative growth occurring in the Upper Rock Creek, Shady Grove and Olney planning areas. If the 32-acre site is not in the right place or is not the right size to meet school needs, it should be swapped for other land so that school needs are addressed first.

If area-wide enrollments really do shrink to levels that permit small class sizes within existing school facilities, and the land is not swapped to enable a much needed Civic Center in Town Center, then this property is appropriate for housing with a portion for affordable housing consistent with the MPDU law. Any housing built on this site must conform to the R200 zoning standards, respect the environmental constraints of the land, and be compatible with the existing single-family detached developments that surround the site. According to the General Plan guidelines, this site is too far from public transportation facilities to be appropriate for a high-density affordable housing project. While each master plan needs to contribute its share, as Councilmember Knapp has observed, "the affordable housing crisis cannot be resolved in the next three master plans" (Olney, Damascus and Germantown).

Town Center - Rezoning Olney's core to a new mixed-use zone (MXTC) opens the door to more density increases. The community understood the new mixed-use zone would limit the height of projects in Town Center to 50 feet. The Planning Board Draft now stipulates 5 stories and with no height limit. This recommendation will produce a different visual character and significantly more density that will tax an ailing infrastructure.

The Planning Board Draft is clear about the community need for a Civic Center but does not go far enough to make it happen. We urge the Planning Board to work with the County to create tax credits or other strong incentives for current landowners to move this effort forward now. As we have stated before, the county-owned 32-acre site could contribute: if it is not needed for education it could be sold to a private developer and the proceeds used to help fund incentives for a Civic Center in Town Center.

Southeast Quadrant, Mess and Norbeck Country Club Properties – We endorse the Planning Board's position not to expand or extend sewer lines for the remaining large properties in Olney. Rezoning these properties RNC at .2 units per acre on septic or .33 on sewer (for those properties that connect to existing sewers) with the likely addition of an MPDU bonus on top of that produces too much density for both the infrastructure and the environment to absorb. The absolute maximum density for RNC properties should be .2 or .33 *including 12.5% MPDUs with no additional bonuses. This yield exceeds the effective yield available under existing zoning with septic.*

Golden Bear – We agree that if the ICC is built, this is a logical place for increased density. Rezoning Golden Bear from RE2 to R200 / TDR 7 increases the potential yield of the 85 acres that make up this area from 43 units to a theoretical max of 725 units including MPDU's. Since this zoning change was justified by the proximity of the ICC right of way, approval of preliminary and site plans for Golden Bear should be contingent on the construction of the ICC.

Parks – A Survey of Olney residents published in August 2002 showed that 74% of the 923 respondents identified the need for more walking/biking opportunities and 48.5% said that roads in Olney are NOT pedestrian/bicycle friendly. On a list of proposed improvements, respondents top three choices were 1) Create more sidewalks and bike paths, 2) Support more telecommuting policies and 3) Add new lanes at congested intersections.

Instead, the Parks department focused on expanding large athletic facilities (Olney Manor Recreational Park and the Olney Boys and Girls Club) and on acquiring land for three more ball fields along Batchellors Forest Road. Nothing is recommended to respond to the need for walking / biking paths. It is interesting to note that the Parks department needs analysis assumes 39,500 people in Olney by the year 2010. The 2003 Census update shows 39,260 people in Olney in 2003.

Transportation – Most of the Olney planning area depends on two-lane roads. As the density of development has increased, the capacity of these roads has remained fixed. This has resulted in lower levels of service and increased congestion, especially in southern Olney. According to the July 2004 Annual Development Approval and Congestion (ADAC) Report, there are at least 10 intersections in the Olney – Sandy Spring – Upper Rock Creek area at or above the 100% CLV standard. Unfortunately the ADAC report is based on traffic counts as old as 2000.

The Olney Coalition measured traffic at some of the same intersections in November of 2003. This data showed higher levels of congestion. For example, the ADAC report shows Olney Mill and Route 108 at 1430-CLV versus a standard of 1475. The Coalition's count at this intersection was 1865-CLV in the morning and 2244-CLV in the evening. Before any additional development is added to the pipeline, the CLV data needs to be updated and if it exceeds the standard, improvements need to be completed to reduce congestion before new development puts more traffic on the roads.

Environmental Resources – We support the recommendation to extend the Upper Rock Creek SPA to include the portions of the North Branch watershed that lie north of Route 108. However, we fail to understand how the watershed can be protected without including all of it in the SPA and the associated Overlay Zone. Nor do we understand the logic of restoring Williamsburg Run on the Norbeck Country Club property but not on the 32-acre property immediately upstream. Finally, the sensitive Northwest Branch of the Anacostia warrants an SPA and Overlay Zone to ensure that development in Southeast Quadrant does not undo all the work the Army Corps of Engineers has done to restore this watershed downstream. This is particularly true in light of the number and scale of institutional uses planned or already approved for the Southeast quadrant.

SUMMARY

The 1980 Olney master plan provided an exceptionally clear blueprint for Olney that conforms to the General Plan vision of a satellite town in a wedge area. The TDR and MPDU programs caused development in Olney to exceed both the projections in the 1980 plan and the capacity of the area's infrastructure. Now is the time for the Council to bring Olney's master plan back into balance so that sufficient infrastructure is available to support build out at appropriate levels of density to preserve Olney's quality of life.

Respectfully,

Nancy Wendt
On Behalf of The Olney Coalition