



ideas that work

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Stuart R. Barr

April 25, 2016

BY HAND DELIVERY

John Schlichting, Director
Planning and Code Administration
City of Gaithersburg
31 South Summit Avenue
Gaithersburg MD 20877

Re: **Annexation X-7067-2015 (Johnson Properties)**
Petition for Annexation into the City of Gaithersburg
Approximately 23.45 acres - Northwest corner of Darnestown Road (MD Route 28)
and Quince Orchard Road (MD Route 124)
Property Owners: Johnson Family Enterprises, LLC and Three Amigos Real Estate,
LLC
Submission of Revised Sketch Plan

Dear Mr. Schlichting:

As you are aware, in December, 2015, we requested a postponement of the Annexation review process for Case Number X-7067-2015 (the Johnson Properties). We requested additional time for community outreach and assessment of the original plan that was submitted in connection with the annexation petition in June, 2015. We now have prepared a revised Sketch Plan and are submitting it for the City's review and consideration.

Community Outreach Efforts

In October, 2015, we held a community outreach meeting to present the original Sketch Plan that was submitted in connection with the annexation petition. Based on that outreach meeting and subsequent communications, it was clear that the community had concerns with the original Sketch Plan. The County Planning Board conducted a public hearing in November, 2015 and decided not to support the original Sketch Plan. Rather than continue with the original plan at that point, we decided to postpone the process and take a step back to engage the community and apply those comments to a revised plan.

Mayor and City Council
X-7067-2015
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Over the past few months, we have studied questions raised by community members primarily involving density, school capacity, open space, and transportation. We have conducted a number of meetings and a number of more informal conversations as part of our community engagement. The community outreach efforts overall have consisted of:

- One-on-one meetings with local civic and community leaders, such as the leaders of Willow Ridge Civic Association, North Potomac Civic Association, Hidden Ponds and Orchard Hills Homeowners Associations.
- Meetings with the representatives of the Quince Orchard Cluster, as well as the principals and PTSA presidents of both Quince Orchard High School and Thurgood Marshall Elementary School.
- Small group meetings with adjoining homeowners and the Darnestown Civic Association.
- A February 23, 2016 community workshop that included small discussion sessions for residents to provide input, feedback and ask questions about three key areas: schools, traffic, and the design of our development plan. Close to 100 residents attended this meeting and participated in the breakout sessions.
- A March 22, 2016 community wide meeting to present an updated plan based on the input we received from community members.
- A website – www.johnsonpropertyannexation.net – on which we post information about the community-wide meetings and our efforts to revise the plan. We also created a contact form for residents to send questions and comments via the website.
- Email updates to send invitations to our community meetings and respond to questions and concerns from residents.

Revised Sketch Plan

Based on these outreach efforts, we have prepared the attached Sketch Plan, which substantially revises the project. When compared with the original plan submitted with the annexation petition, the revised Sketch Plan:

- Reduces the maximum number of residential units from 305 to 110. The 110 units are proposed as a mix of up to 28 single-family homes and up to 82 townhomes and will include any Moderately Priced Dwelling Units and Workforce Housing Units.

- Eliminates all proposed multi-family housing (185 units).
- Reduces maximum additional commercial space from 285,000 square feet to only 10,000 square feet.
- Preserves the existing height of commercial space.
- Substantially increases proposed park and open space.
- Reconfigures proposed site circulation, which will likely result in greater separation between proposed single-family units on the north and west perimeter of the property and adjoining properties.
- Provides signalized access to Darnestown Road for the existing community through Nursery Lane.

Undoubtedly, some community members will believe that the enclosed plan does not go far enough and that any proposed development on the property must be identical to current County zoning. We believe that the enclosed plan is a good plan, is appropriate for the site, and is compatible with the surrounding community.

We recognize that the County's Great Seneca Science Corridor Master Plan identifies the western portion of the property as a potential site for a public park to provide ball fields for active recreation. At the same time, it states that if the property is not acquired for an active recreation park site, then the County Master Plan recommends that the property "may be appropriate for residential use including single family detached and townhouse units." We believe that our proposed development is consistent with these recommendations from the County Master Plan, along with recommendations from the City's Master Plan and the goals and objectives of the City's MXD zone.

The western portion of the property is transitional in nature. It is located in between existing residential uses and existing commercial uses. Frequently, in this type of situation, the development that is proposed is transitional in nature with a mix of unit types and density. For example, the commercial uses at the Quince Orchard Road/Darnestown Road intersection are surrounded by existing townhomes to the north (on McDonald Chapel Drive), the east (on Orchard Drive and Cherry Blossom Place), the west (on Granite Ridge Drive), and northwest (on Hayshire Court). The same is true for many other areas adjoining other commercial areas and major crossroads sites in the County.

We believe that the property has the potential to be a very well designed, smart growth, pedestrian-friendly, and environmentally sensitive residential community with open spaces and a variety of unit types for a variety of life styles. As shown on the attached revised

Sketch Plan, larger single family detached lots are provided on the perimeter of the property to promote compatible relationships with existing homes and provide an appropriate transition to the commercial portions of the property along Darnestown Road. We believe that townhome units, as recommended in the County Master Plan, are appropriate towards the interior of the site.

We understand that the proposed number of units is greater than the number of units allowed under the current County R-200 zone. But we believe that it is comparable to what could be proposed under a County townhouse rezoning application and is the type of development that is frequently proposed on many other infill sites throughout the area, particularly for sites located along major roadways or that serve a transitional purpose between commercial development and single-family residential. The proposed density under the revised Sketch Plan is fewer than 8 units per acre, which is less dense than many other examples of infill development that share similar characteristics with the Johnson properties.

We spent a significant amount of time studying the open space. We prepared the attached illustrative plan that reflects a potential layout of the units in relation to open space, which could become a combination of a playing field and park. The illustrative plan reflects a conceptual potential layout, but could be subject to certain “binding elements” consistent with the Sketch Plan such as single-family and townhouse uses only, a maximum of 110 units (including Moderately Priced Dwelling Units and Workforce Housing Units), and a minimum size open space area of at least one acre.

We ask the City to review the enclosed plan and to schedule the City Planning Commission recommendation and City Council public hearing dates. If you have any questions or need any additional information, please let us know. Thank you very much for your consideration.

Very truly yours,



Stuart R. Barr

Attachments:

Revised Sketch Plan
Illustrative Plan

cc: Russell Johnson
Josh Sloan
Ellen Bogage
Robert Harris, Esq.