

March 10, 2023

To: City of Gaithersburg Council

In re: Lakeforest Redevelopment Sketch Plan

The League of Women Voters of Montgomery County (LWVMC) supports a balanced transportation and land use system that is accessible to all residents and incorporates all forms of transportation. After our examination of the current Lakeforest Redevelopment Sketch Plan, we have some “quality of life” concerns. Everything in this plan depends on good land use choices and transit decisions, and therefore it must take into account accessibility, convenience, safety and other factors.

- **EQUITY** – The sketch plan moves the transit hub away from its current riders and low-income minorities. The current site features a level, walkable transit station at the intersection of Lost Knife Road and Odendhal Avenue, and the current station serves a broad spectrum of local destination transit riders (townhouses, rental units and shopping centers). Moving the hub will create a hardship for the existing low-income community, who at the moment can walk to the facility for bus services.
 - Russell Avenue, where the sketch plan places the new station, is a solely commercial location with auto-centric, private parking. Moving the transit hub there would force Montgomery Village riders to drive to the new hub in order to take the bus and it will attract nonresidents who will need to drive and park in an area where we want to encourage more walking.
- **BUS RAPID TRANSIT (BRT) SERVICE** –The sketch plan should be coordinated with the BRT proposals (for example, is a stop still planned for the Perry Avenue and Lakeforest Boulevard intersection along N. Frederick Ave – MD 355?) as well as with the new study about buses in Montgomery County (<https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/DOT-Transit/reimagined/>). Spur bus routes also should be considered.
- **PUBLIC AMENITIES** – Local amenities should be distributed throughout the design layout for housing. For example, there ought to be a seniors’ independent living facility and recreation center as well as a teen center, a community center, a swimming pool and an outdoor theater. All of these facilities are important for residents of the townhouses, condominiums and rental housing in the neighborhood.
- **PUBLIC PARKS & TRAILS** – This development should feature public parks, recreation trails, bike trails and playgrounds near housing with walkable features throughout the area, just as in other surrounding communities. Every development benefits from more green space and more ways for its residents to enjoy it.

(continued In re: Lakeforest Redevelopment Sketch Plan)

- **WALKABILITY** – Places that are easily walkable create a strong feeling of neighborliness and reduce the need to drive; Kentlands and Rockville Town Square are two examples of this. In addition, local small businesses, restaurants and other services should be located on the ground floors of housing, perhaps with some space reserved for startups. Walkable courtyards should also be considered. Designing spaces with more green space that require fewer cars will result in a healthier environment.
- **THIRD RETENTION POND** – By law, all water runoff must be dealt with on the property through retention, such as is demonstrated in the Gaithersburg master plan. Relying on just two retention ponds for stormwater management to serve the Lakeforest Redevelopment Sketch Plan may not be enough and may have unintended consequences. Forecasters predict that weather in our region will include more frequent rainstorms with heavier downpours. The increased rain will contribute to more impervious surface stormwater runoff into these ponds.

LWVMC urges Lakeforest decision-makers to keep equity, transit, amenities, convenience, green space, walkability, safety and climate change in the forefront of the planning process as they move forward. We also strongly recommend that the Council add these important “quality of life” priorities into your Lakeforest Redevelopment Sketch Plan, which will help increase sales and rentals as well as attract business investors to this location.

Nancy Bliss and Vicky Stella, co-presidents

From: [Suzie Ward](#)
To: [CityHall External Mail](#); [Rob Robinson](#)
Subject: Lakeforest Mall Sketch Plan Z-9444-2022
Date: Friday, March 10, 2023 4:59:01 PM

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March 10, 2023

Dear Mayor Ashman, City Council, and Planning Staff:

I am writing to you concerning the Lakeforest Mall Rezoning & Sketch Plan: Z-9444-2022. Please have my letter entered into the record.

I previously wrote to you concerning this project on February 13, 2023, Exhibit #94. I will not reiterate everything that I have already said as that would be redundant, but I would like to highlight a couple of things and add few other ideas.

I must mention again the 1.7 acre, native oak forest that exists on the northeast corner of the property. This was designated as a "tree save" property when Lakeforest Mall was created. The developer has said that there are dead or dying trees in this plot, therefore the entire area should be bulldozed and destroyed. Actually, this is the circle life in a forest. Some trees become diseased and/or die after some years making room for saplings and young trees to take over and grow to maturity. It is the life cycle of a forest. The ecosystem in this small forest has developed over decades, if not centuries. It cannot be replicated in a year or two. Please do NOT destroy the part of this project that makes it LakeFOREST.

In the past twenty years, Montgomery and Prince Georges Counties have been responsible for over 50% of the tree loss or deforestation on Maryland.^[1] Several letters in this record have quoted how many trees and forests have been lost to development in Gaithersburg in recent years. It is time to stop the annihilation of Gaithersburg's forest and tree population. It is becoming a non-tree city.

I will reiterate that Pond #3 should be retained. The *Lakeforest Mall Master Plan* stated that it should remain in place. The wildlife and the ecosystem surrounding the pond depend on its existence. Removal of the pond and the forest might necessitate the renaming of this project.

There are equity and environmental issues that must be addressed with this development. The population surrounding Lakeforest has been documented to be very diverse, low income, with low access to food and an Urban Heat Island.^[2] It will be a food desert if there is no grocery store put in place. The Lakeforest Master Plan

stipulated that the diverse population was desirable to retain^[3], therefore housing prices should be those that this population can truly afford. To address the Urban Heat Island issue, more actual green space must be provided, a real park where one can play soccer, throw a ball, play Frisbee. Addressing citizens' needs will also include a community center for young and old alike, perhaps a "Makerspace", and more trees, bushes and flowers that will encourage wildlife to come and abide in Lakeforest too.

As Council people and Mayor, I believe that your job encompasses overseeing development that is in the best interest of ALL of your constituents. That includes those who vote as well as those who do not or are unable to do so. It also includes the environment, the land, the fauna and flora. They do not have a vote, but they will be sorely impacted if Lakeforest is developed with only an eye to tax dollars and making money for developers. Our eco-system is in jeopardy of being assaulted and ravaged. The Lakeforest Mall Master Plan looked for a "vibrant, sustainable community" to be developed. Now is the time to use nature-based solutions and nature-positive development on this site. Solar panels, electric vehicle charging stations, and green roofs are just the beginnings of suggestions.

We cannot continue to develop in a way that treats the environment and its resources as so many paper towels that we can use, throw away and buy another one. We cannot! Our environmental resources are FINITE. We have a moral obligation to develop responsibly, and sustainably with an eye to the future and future generations. What we do today is going to directly affect children, our successive generations and us.

Our climate, our earth, is crying out, literally, for us to stop destroying it. We are having droughts, hurricanes, tornadoes and rainstorms of increasing intensity and destructiveness. If you think that what you decide in Gaithersburg does not matter in Florida or California, think again. The whole earth is connected and interdependent. We are all in this together. We must do our part to stanch the bleeding of our environment, ecology and our earth. There are ecological, environmentally sustainable ways to develop. We must pursue those avenues. The time has come to stand up and be adults, to make whatever tough choices need to be made and NOT to buckle to developers who want to make an extra buck. Inappropriate and overdevelopment does not produce more taxes revenue in the end.

Please listen to the concerns and needs that community members have voiced and do what is necessary to develop Lakeforest Mall in a sustainable, nature forward manner to create a new, vibrant place for all of Gaithersburg's residents, especially those who reside on the east side, those who have been left behind for too long. After all, without Olde Towne and the east side, there would be no Gaithersburg.

Sincerely,

Suzie Ward
437 Gaither Street
Gaithersburg, MD 20877

[1] *Technical Study on Changes in Forest Cover and Tree Canopy in Maryland*, (TSCFCTCM), November 16, 2022, p. 11

[2] *City of Gaithersburg-Environment and Sustainability-A Master Plan Element (ES)*, pp. 54-55, 71-72

[3] *Lakeforest Master Plan*, p. 44