
MEMORANDUM TO: Mayor and City Council
Planning Commission

FROM: Samuel Copelan, Planner II

DATE: April 4, 2025

SUBJECT: Final Staff Analysis
SDP-9896-2024: 10003 and 10009 Fields Road

APPLICANT

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TAX MAP REFERENCE:

Tax Assessment Map # FS42

TAX ACCOUNT NUMBERS:

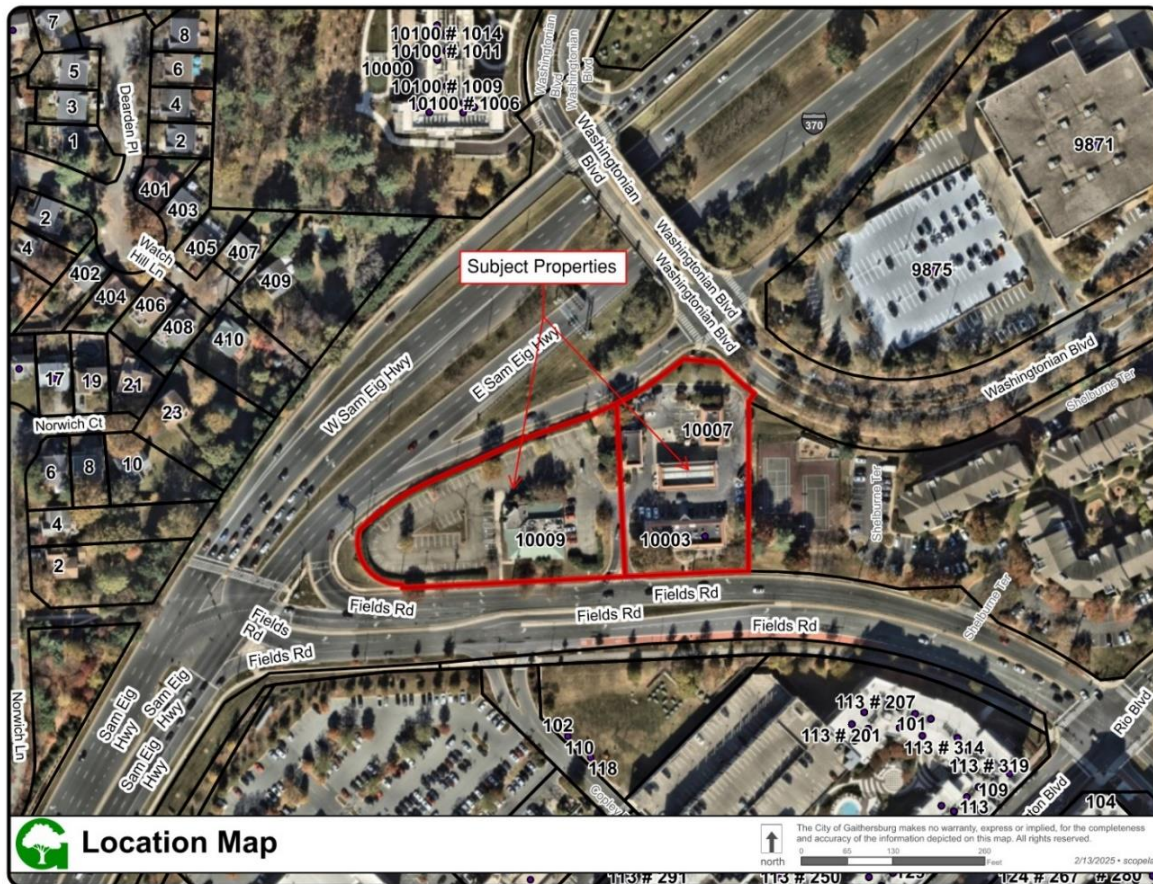
ID # 09-03204385
ID # 09-03204374

REQUEST

Bohler Engineering (“Applicant”) submitted Schematic Development Plan (SDP) application, SDP-9896-2024 on August 2, 2024 (Exhibit #1). Application SDP-9896-2024 proposes a 5,106 square-foot car wash facility and associated site improvements. This application was reviewed under the Zoning Ordinance in effect at the time of submission in accordance with § 24-1.2 of the 2024 City Zoning Ordinance Update, “Any application, including any sketch plans, schematic development plans or site development plans included therein, that is submitted prior to the effective date of the 2024 City Zoning Ordinance Update and that is deemed valid and complete and includes all application’s submission shall be reviewed by the planning division, planning commission, city council and all other relevant city agencies pursuant to the standards of the zoning code in effect at the time of the application’s submission, as long as the submission proceeds for review and approval within two (2) years of its submission.”

LOCATION

The subject area of the application (“Subject Properties”) is located at 10003 and 10009 Fields Road, which contains two lots (Tax account numbers 09-03204385 and 09-



Location Map

03204374). The Subject Properties are bounded by Fields Road to the South, Sam Eig Highway to the West and North, and Washingtonian Boulevard to the northeast. The Subject Properties are zoned MXD (Mixed Use Development).

PROJECT BACKGROUND

The Applicant, Bohler Engineering, submitted Schematic Development Plan (SDP) application requesting the construction for a 5,106 square-foot car wash facility and associated site improvements.

A joint public hearing was held on March 17, 2025. During the course of the hearing the following aspects of the proposed plan were discussed:

- Were other uses explored for the Subject Property
- Conformance with the 1997 Master Plan
- How the site will be “harmonious” with the adjacent properties
- Car stacking and traffic circulation
- Pedestrian connectivity

There were no speakers from the public during the joint public hearing.

At the conclusion of the hearing, the Planning Commission announced, by motion, the closing of the record on April 9, 2025 at 5 p.m., with recommendation scheduled for April 16, 2025. Subsequently, the Mayor and City Council announced by motion, the closing of their record on April 29, 2025 at 5 p.m., with policy discussion anticipated for May 19, 2025. Staff received written comment from the public while the record was opened and is labeled Exhibit #59 in the record.

In response to the comments received during the joint public hearing, the Applicant has submitted a supplemental response letter (Exhibit #50), links to the traffic videos (Exhibit #51), a revised statement of justification (Exhibit #52), and revised plans (Exhibits #53-57). The analysis, below, focuses on the revised plans and the Applicant’s responses to joint public hearing comments. Items unchanged from the March 17, 2025 joint public hearing can be found in the Preliminary Background Report (Exhibit #44).

as office, restaurants, and highway convenience services. This map designation has high visibility and easy access to surrounding roads which would be a benefit to future office development. Uses that are encouraged on this site would be high-rise office buildings with ancillary commercial/retail business within the office building structure. A landscape buffer shall be included in any site development plan between the tennis courts of the Oakwood Apartments and Map Designation 15.

Land Use and Zoning Actions:

- Adopted **commercial/industrial-research-office** land use designation
- Zoning remains **MXD**

As noted in the Applicant's response letter, a car wash is a permitted use in the MXD zone. The Applicant believes that a car wash is a commercial use, and therefore is in conformance with the commercial/industrial-research-office land use designation in the 1997 Master Plan. The Applicant also notes that the car wash use is consistent with the suggested highway convenience service use. In Exhibit #60, the Applicant further emphasizes that the site currently consists of a mix of uses such as a vacant standalone restaurant building, convenience store, car wash and lube center. Therefore, it meets the intent of the Master Plan to include a mix of uses. The Applicant also noted that there were several potential tenants interested in the Property including a bank, a drive-through restaurant, and a casual restaurant, however none of the proposals were economically feasible or sustainable.

During the public hearing, Staff initially held the opinion that the proposed SDP application was not in conformance with the adopted Master Plan. At that time, Staff believed the proposal would expand a car wash use associated with the existing gas station and that the two properties would consist almost entirely of automotive uses. This interpretation led to the conclusion that the proposal did not align with the goals and vision outlined in the Master Plan. The 1997 Master Plan recommends a mixed-use commercial development for these two parcels, supporting a range of uses such as office spaces, restaurants, and highway-oriented convenience services.

However, after conducting a more thorough evaluation, including a review of past permits and a site visit to the Properties, Staff has reconsidered its position. The Property at 10003 Fields Road currently contains a variety of uses beyond the gas station, including a dry cleaner and a taco restaurant. Both the dry cleaning and taco restaurant received use and occupancy permits that were issued by the City. This mix of commercial, personal service, and automotive uses reflects the intent of the Master Plan's recommendation.

While the plan encourages the development of high-rise office buildings with ancillary commercial or retail components within the structure, this recommendation is aspirational rather than mandatory. It does not require that the Properties to be developed with all three suggested uses identified in the Master Plan.

Furthermore, in light of current economic and market conditions, the viability of new office development is limited. According to the most recent CoStar market report, the demand for new office construction remains low. Although demand for retail and restaurant uses remains strong, rising lease rates and higher construction costs mean that the market does not currently support new retail building construction (Exhibit #58).

Proposed Use Harmonious with Adjacent Properties

There were comments about how the application is harmonious with the adjacent properties. As noted in the Applicant's response letter, the car wash building footprint is smaller than the existing restaurant and will exceed the required 25-percent green area requirement and will incorporate more trees than what is currently on the Property. The plan will also maintain the existing landscape shrubs on the Property. The Applicant also noted that there is an opportunity to create a gateway entrance feature at corner of Fields Road and Sam Eig Highway.

Pedestrian Connectivity

There were comments about pedestrian connectivity on the Property. As noted in the Applicant's response letter, the existing sidewalk along Fields Road will be widened from approximately 3.5' to 10' near the shared drive aisle. This improvement was required by Montgomery County MDOT to meet their Master Plan improvements for Fields Road. The Applicant also explored providing a pedestrian connection from Washingtonian Boulevard. However, due to the lack of space for such improvements, a sidewalk cannot be constructed on the Property. The Applicant is willing to work with the adjacent residential community to secure an easement to construct a sidewalk on the adjacent property to provide pedestrian connection from Washingtonian Boulevard.

Vehicle Circulation & Stacking

As part of the site plan package, the Applicant submitted a revised vehicle circulation plan to show how vehicles can access the Subject Site. In the plans, it shows that thirty-two cars can fit in the tripled stacked lanes and five (5) cars can fit in the car wash tunnel. During the public hearing, there was discussion about the car stacking and traffic circulation. As noted in the Applicant's response letter, they anticipate that there will be an average of 51 daily carwashes from Monday through Friday and 49 daily carwashes on Saturday and Sunday. There were also discussions about vehicles turning left from Fields Road onto the site and a possibility of allowing a right turn from Washingtonian Boulevard. As noted in the Applicant's response letter, closing the left turn lane from Fields Road into the drive aisle would significantly restrict property access and threaten the viability of the existing gas station, lube center, restaurant, and dry cleaners. The letter

also noted that the car wash use proposes “just twelve more PM trips” than the restaurant use, so the traffic levels should be comparable to the previous restaurant.

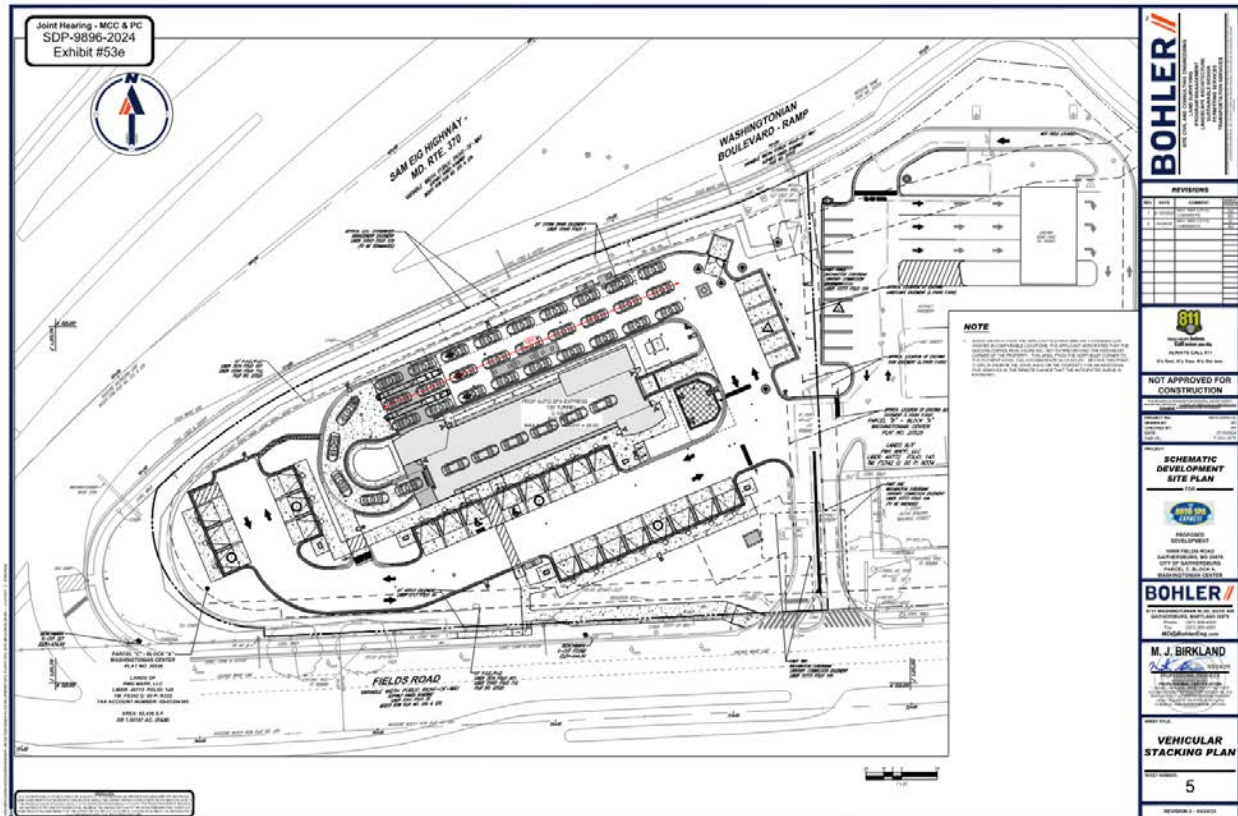


Exhibit #53e shows the stacking plan.

The Applicant’s traffic consultant conducted a Highway Capacity Manual (HCM) analysis that studied the traffic patterns and delays in nearby traffic. Exhibit #51 includes links to videos that show how traffic movements into the site to demonstrate that “there are more than adequate gaps in the traffic to accommodate additional left turns into the Property that will be generated by the carwash customers and will not cause any conflicts between vehicles turning left from Fields Road and vehicles traveling south on Fields Road.”

Staff concurs with the Applicant’s response and finds that the turning movements and stacking plan is acceptable. Staff agrees with the Applicant’s analysis showing that the proposed new trips into the site can be accommodated without any significant negative impact on safety or operations.

A question came up about the feasibility of adding separate entrance into the Subject Property from Washingtonian Boulevard Ramp. The Applicant’s noted that there would not be adequate site distance from the existing intersection. Furthermore, an entrance on Washingtonian Boulevard would require the redevelopment of the site because the right turn entrance would conflict with the existing lube center and would require review and

approval from the Montgomery County DOT. Staff concurs with the Applicant's statement that a right turn from Fields Road would not work for the reasons mentioned above.

Lastly, there was a question about pedestrian connection from Washingtonian Boulevard to the Site. As noted in the Applicant's response letter, the Property line is located behind the curb, so there is no room for a pedestrian connection. The Applicant is open to working with the adjacent property owner to get a pedestrian easement on the neighbor's property to create the referenced path.

Easement and Utility Plans

The Applicant has revised the easement plan based on Staff comments. The main change from the joint public hearing is that easement exhibit has been revised to show all of the easements, and also to show easements that are being extinguished.

Staff Comments

Staff finds that the easement and utility plans have been revised to address previous Staff comments. Staff also notes that the Public Utility Easement (PUE) on the north of the Property will be regraded to a 4:1 slope, which is steeper than what is normally allowed. The Applicant will need to obtain approval from the utility companies prior to plan certification approving the preliminary utility plan and grading within the easement. Therefore, a condition of approval has been included.

Preliminary Forest Conservation and Landscape Plans

The preliminary forest conservation plan was revised to address previous comments. The Applicant is still proposing fourteen (14) different types of canopy trees, which include red maples (*Acer Rubrum*), tulip trees (*Liriodendron Tulipifera*), and American elms (*Ulmus Americana* 'Princeton'). The project is required to provide 0.23-acres of canopy coverage, and the Applicant is proposing 0.25-acres of canopy coverage, which is a reduction to what was presented during the joint public hearing but still meets the afforestation requirement.

The preliminary landscape plans were revised since the joint public hearing. Instead of 51 sweet pepper-bushes (*Clethra Alnifolia*) and 45 common cherry laurel (*Prunus Laurocerasus*), the Applicant is now proposing 47 sweet pepper-bushes (*Clethra Alnifolia*) and 73 common cherry laurel (*Prunus Laurocerasus*).

Staff Comments

Staff is supportive of the preliminary forest conservation plan and landscape plan. The proposed plan will meet the required afforestation requirements. The plan will maintain the existing landscape shrubs and enhance the Property with more landscaping. Staff notes that any proposed landscaping in easement will require approval from the easement holder at the time of final site plan.

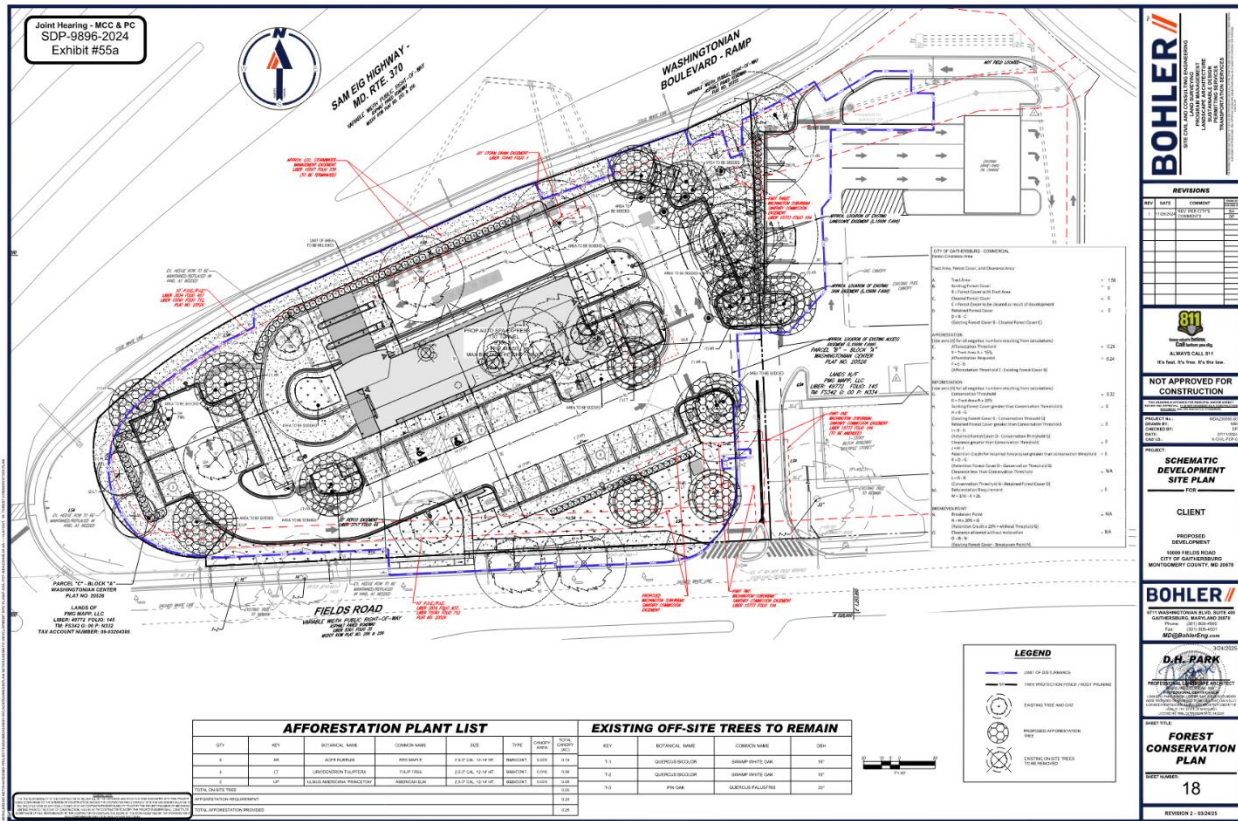


Exhibit #55a shows the preliminary forest conservation plan.

Stormwater Management and Sediment & Erosion Control

In accordance with the requirement for the submission of a Schematic Development Plan, Section 24-160D.9(b), the Applicant has submitted a preliminary stormwater management plan and sediment erosion control plan applications SEC-9834-2025 and SWM-9835-2025. Both preliminary plans have been approved and have been added into the record as Exhibits #46-48.

Architecture

The Applicant has submitted preliminary architectural elevations for the car wash, which have not changed since the joint public hearing (Exhibit #54a-b). The proposed building will be one-story tall that measures 28-feet in height. The proposed facades are pre-finished metal panels, fiber cement panels, glass, and a stone-veneer water table.

Staff Comments

Staff supports the preliminary architecture and finds that the Applicant is using a variety of material and techniques to break up the massing of the building. The proposed building will be designed to complement and will be compatible with surrounding buildings.

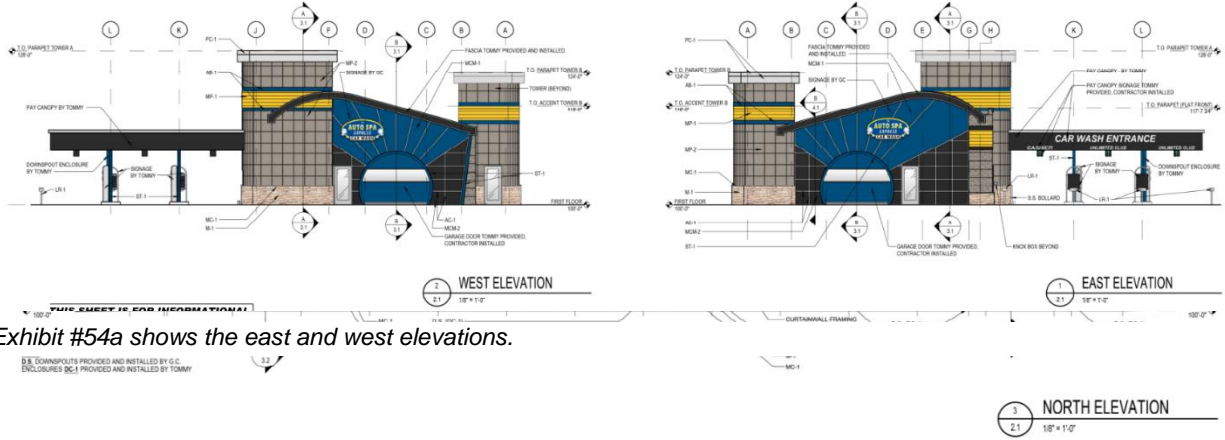


Exhibit #54a shows the east and west elevations.

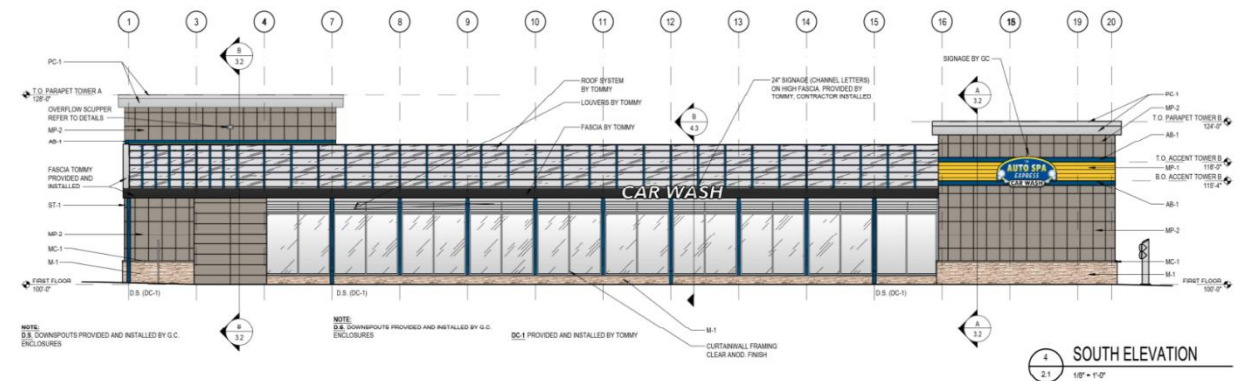


Exhibit #54a shows the north and south elevations.

STAFF FINDINGS, ANALYSIS AND RECOMMENDATION

FINDINGS:

Approval of SDP-9896-2024, by the City Council is dependent upon the findings required under § 24-160D.10(b) of the City Code. The following outlines the required findings and justifications for a City Council approval of application SDP-9896-2024.

(1) The plan is substantially in accord with the approved sketch plan; and

The subject application SDP-9896-2024 is consistent with the approved Sketch Plan which was part of Annexation Agreement X-159. The approved sketch plan permits up to 4,525,000 square feet of mixed commercial uses overall throughout the sketch plan area, which includes all the Washingtonian area. The proposed

5,106 square-foot car wash is less than the existing 5,565 square foot restaurant which is reducing the amount of commercial area on the Subject Property.

(2) The plan meets or accomplishes the purposes, objectives and minimum standards and requirements of the zone, and other requirements of the City Code; and

- a) Application SDP-9896-2024 encourages the efficient use of land by locating commercial uses adjacent to established commercial, employment and recreational areas. The car wash is located adjacent to a gas station that also contains a restaurant and a dry cleaner on the same property. The development will make improvements to an existing sidewalk along Fields Road to improve pedestrian connectivity.
- b) Application SDP-9896-2024 assures compatibility of the proposed land uses by incorporating a new commercial use that will complement the existing commercial and residential uses found within the larger Rio-Washingtonian Center and adjacent Crown development.
- c) Application SDP-9896-2024 will provide the area with additional commercial uses and maintain employment opportunities in close proximity to existing residential areas.
- d) Application SDP-9896-2024 will enhance the already existing mix of uses.

(3) The plan is in accord with the area master plan and any accompanying special condition or requirements contained in said master plan for the area under consideration; and

Application SDP-9896-2024 is in conformance with the 1997 Master Plan. The Subject Properties are included in the 1997 Master Plan as Neighborhood Three, Study Area 6, Land Use Option 15. The Master Plan designed the Properties as commercial/industrial-research-office land use designation. The Master Plan noted that this designation will allow a use that is consistent with a mixed-use commercial development such as office, restaurants and highway convenience services. The proposed car wash will be a commercial use that is adjacent to established mix of commercial uses.

- (4) The plan will be internally and externally compatible and harmonious with existing and planned land uses in the MXD zoned area and adjacent areas; and

Application SDP-9896-2024 will be compatible and harmonious to the adjacent Crown and Washingtonian developments. The plan will not adversely affect the character of the area due to it being adjacent to existing mix of commercial uses adjacent to similar land uses and the plan will be constructed within existing road networks and make improvements to enhance pedestrian experience.

- (5) That existing or planned public facilities are adequate to service the proposed development contained in the plan; and

The Subject Application complies with the City's adequate public facilities requirements, as follows:

1. **Traffic Impacts** (§ 24-245) – According to the submitted Traffic Impact Study (TRF-9900-2024), the proposed development will generate 40 AM, 62 PM, and 97 Saturday peak hour trips. The analysis concludes that there is sufficient transportation capacity to accommodate the proposed development. The traffic impact study has been reviewed and determined that the proposed development meets the adequacy criteria of the City of Gaithersburg Traffic Impact Study Standards and regulations.
2. **Schools** (§ 24-246) - The proposed development will be for a commercial use and will not have impacts on the school system. Therefore, the proposed development is exempt from the City's school test.
3. **Water and Sewer Services and Public Utilities** (§ 24-247) - The Subject Property is served by water category W-1 (public water available) and sewer category S-1 (public sewer available) of Washington Suburban Sanitary Commission (WSSC) services, therefore satisfies the requirements for water and sewer.
4. **Fire and Emergency Services** (§ 24-248) - The City's Adequate Public Facilities Ordinance (APFO) requires that any development project be served by at least two fire stations within a ten-minute response time. The Site is located within a ten-minute response time of three (3) fire stations: Station 8 (Gaithersburg), 31 (Rockville), and 32 (Travilah). Therefore, adequate fire and emergency services are provided.

- (6) That the development staging or phasing program is adequate in relation to the provision of public facilities and private amenities to service the proposed development; and

The proposed development will be integrated within existing road networks and completed one phase. Therefore, no staging or phasing is required for the implementation of the plan.

- (7) That the plan, if approved, would be in the public interest.

The car wash will be located within an existing larger mixed-use commercial development and within proximity to existing residential neighborhoods. The proposed amendment expands commercial options and will provide an amenity to community and contributes to the overall economic health of the City of Gaithersburg. Lastly, the plan will not have any adverse impacts to existing development and adjacent properties.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff is supportive of the subject application, SDP-9896-2024. The plan meets and fulfills the purposes, objectives, and minimum standards and requirements of the MXD zone. While Staff was not initially convinced at the time of the joint public hearing that the proposed use was in conformance with the Master Plan recommendations, additional research confirmed that the City had approved a mix of uses at 10003 Fields Road. Staff is now of the opinion that the replacement of a restaurant with a car wash use will maintain the mix of uses as envisioned in the Master Plan. The proposed plan is in compliance with the Master Plan and sketch plan by providing a commercial use adjacent to existing commercial uses. Furthermore, the plan continues to support a mix of uses within the larger Rio Washingtonian Center and the adjacent Crown development. The proposed building materials and design will integrate harmoniously with the existing development and will not adversely affect the surrounding community. The Applicant is proposing to add green space that exceeds the 25-percent requirement in the MXD Zone, along with additional landscaping. While Staff is supportive of the plans, there are some minor site plan cleanups that need to be addressed prior to the final signature of the plans. Therefore, a condition of approval has been included.

Staff recommends THAT THE PLANNING COMMISSION, BASED ON THE EVIDENCE AND TESTIMONY SUBMITTED TO THE RECORD AND THE FINDINGS IN THE FINAL STAFF ANALYSIS, RECOMMEND APPROVAL OF SDP-9896-2024, TO THE MAYOR AND CITY COUNCIL, WITH TWO (2) CONDITIONS:

1. Prior to the certification of the plans, the Applicant will provide approval from the utility companies to regrade within the PUE, and the preliminary utility plan.
2. Prior to certification of the plans, Applicant will submit revised site plans to address minor staff comments to be approved by Planning and Department of Public Works Staff.