

2222 Wisconsin Avenue, N.W.  
Washington, DC 20007  
(202)333-6680

*De Vol*  
FUNERAL HOME

10 East Deer Park Drive  
Gaithersburg, MD 20877  
(301)948-6800

September 16, 2020

The Honorable Jud Ashman, Mayor  
And Members of the Gaithersburg City Council  
City of Gaithersburg  
31 S. Summit Avenue  
Gaithersburg, MD 20877

Re: DeVol Funeral Home House Addition – Concept Plan No. 8415-2020 (the “Concept Plan”)

Dear Mayor and City Councilmembers:

I would like to thank the Mayor and Council and City staff for their consideration of the Concept Plan, which proposes the conversion of an existing house on our property to a funeral home with viewing parlors and cremation equipment. Enclosed for submission into the record of the Concept Plan, which is set to close on September 16, 2020, are memoranda prepared by Scott Wallace, land use counsel for the project, and Carol Lynn Green, environmental counsel, addressing questions raised by the Mayor and Council and community at the August 3<sup>rd</sup> Mayor and Council public hearing and thereafter.<sup>1</sup> In addition, I would like to offer the following comments as to why I am proposing this project for your consideration.

As you know, the DeVol Funeral Home and my family have been members of the community for over thirty years. We have a lot of pride in the fact that we can say our funeral home is located in Gaithersburg, Maryland. We have strived since opening our doors to have the City equally proud to have the DeVol Family as a corporate citizen. We have been involved in many community events over the years, including the Golden Shovel Awards, police events, and the July 4<sup>th</sup> celebration.

DeVol Funeral Home serves a very diverse community that celebrates many cultural and religious practices. As our families’ plans and expectations for funeral services have changed over the years, the services we offer have had to adapt to meet our families’ needs. Most notably, requests for cremation services have increased dramatically. The customs of many of these diverse cultures and faiths require that the families participate in the cremation ceremony.

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<sup>1</sup> Subsequent to the public hearing, on September 9, 2020 I held a virtual community informational meeting on the Concept Plan. By letter dated September 15, 2020, Mr. Wallace requested the record be reopened until October 7, 2020 to allow for our team to thoroughly respond to questions presented at the September 9<sup>th</sup> community meeting. I understand that request will be considered at the September 21, 2020 Mayor and Council meeting.

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Currently I use an off-site, third-party crematory that has many restrictions, such as restricting the times these ceremonies can occur and the number of people that can participate. Not only can't I fully meet our families' service needs, but very often we are losing their business. DeVol Funeral Home prides itself on caring for the loved ones of the families it serves throughout the entire death care process. It is consistent with this approach to funeral service that we wish to offer our own cremation services and not entrust the decedent to a third party. In summary, providing cremation services on-site would allow DeVol Funeral Home to accommodate the physical, religious, and logistical needs of our community.

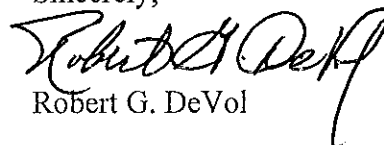
Community trust is of the utmost importance to the DeVol Family. We have earned a solid reputation over the last thirty years in Gaithersburg, and would never jeopardize this reputation by requesting approval of any aspect of my business that would be considered unsafe. I have obtained a Certified Crematory Operators Certification through the National Funeral Directors Association (NFDA). I am committed to operating the proposed crematory to meet the highest standards of excellence of my profession and in the same safe, lawful, and discrete manner as we have always conducted our business.

I was asked during the August 3<sup>rd</sup> public hearing about what the impact of not receiving approval of the Concept Plan would have on my business. While this would not shut the business down in the short term, it would certainly threaten its long term viability given the move towards cremation and the needs of the families I am serving. I wish to sustain my relationship with the City, to remain a loyal business partner, and to represent our diverse community through inclusion.

I have certainly heard the community's concerns about the cremation process. I also understand their broader concerns about development in the vicinity of their homes. While I, of course, share their interest in maintaining a healthy living environment for their families and I for my employees, families, and self, the fact-based and science-based information my consultants have presented to you and the community clearly shows that the cremation equipment will be designed, maintained and operated to meet rigorous safety standards to which I am committed and will not pose any public health, safety or environmental harm to the community. I ask that the City Council review the Concept Plan application based solely on this information about the project and on its own merit and not based on the broader concerns over development expressed by the community about other projects recently considered by the City. If you do this, I believe you will clearly conclude that the project is in the public interest.

Thank you for your interest and continued consideration in this matter.

Sincerely,

  
Robert G. DeVol