



OFFICE OF THE COUNTY EXECUTIVE
ROCKVILLE, MARYLAND 20850

Isiah Leggett
County Executive

March 16, 2017

Mr. Casey Anderson, Chair
Montgomery County Planning Board
8787 Georgia Avenue
Silver Spring, Maryland 20910

Dear Mr. Anderson:

We write this letter regarding the Equity One/HOC sketch plan currently pending review by the Planning Board within the Westbard Sector Plan boundaries. Over the past few weeks, we have both met with members of the Macedonia Baptist Church regarding their belief that a portion of this site contains the graves of ancestors of members of their church. During these meetings, members of the church community stated their concerns that the process outlined by the Planning Board to study the site for evidence of such a burial site may be deficient. Principally they are concerned that allowing the developer to not only pay for the study but to also pay for the peer review panel prejudices the objectivity of the outcome. The group is quite wary of both the Planning Department, Planning Board, and the developer in this process.

While we are aware of the steps taken by the Planning Board to commission an archeological delineation study on the site and have confidence in the staff of the Planning Board, we both believe it is important that, to the best of our ability, we take some added measures to assist those who believe their ancestors were buried on this site and obtain as much certainty and closure as possible.

Because the community remains understandably concerned about the process thus far, we agree that it would be wise for us to pause for a moment, bring all the parties together to address the various concerns that have been expressed and seek a solution that all can agree upon before we move forward.

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Because the archeological study of the property is crucial, and in order for it to be credible to all, we need to re-engage the community and clearly define the parameters and technical requirements to ensure that it is being done appropriately, sensitively, and provides the proper analysis. We recommend that the Planning Board, Members of the Macedonia Baptist Church congregation, along with representatives of the Council and Executive Branches, meet with a neutral third-party mediator to seek a productive, mutually agreeable path forward. If all parties are in agreement with the process then the County will retain a mediator immediately. Once the mediation is concluded and the parties have agreed to the scope and terms of the archeological study and peer review, the County will consider funding both the study and the peer-review.

In the end, this mediated process will allow all involved to move forward, to come to resolution on an array of sensitive issues, and hopefully enable members of this community to be assured that all involved with this property have dutifully respected the memory of their deceased relatives.

We look forward to working with you on this important issue. My assistant, Joy Nurmi, will be in touch with you regarding next steps.

Sincerely,



Isiah Leggett
County Executive



Roger Berliner, President
Montgomery County Council