

Testimony by Mayor Barney Rush
Town of Chevy Chase, Maryland
*Public Hearing on Funding Requests for the
Farm Women's Market Redevelopment Project*
November 15, 2022

President Albornoz and County Councilmembers,

Thank you for this opportunity to speak today in favor of the County Council approving two funding requests, which will complete the financial plan for creation of two new urban parks in Bethesda. The development of these parks will accompany the refurbishment and expansion of the historical Farm Women's Market. These projects, collectively, will create an exciting series of amenities for Bethesda and the surrounding communities, adding greatly to the quality of life for residents, workers, and visitors, and augmenting retail tax revenue. It will also demonstrate the County's commitment to environmental stewardship, creating one of the largest green roofs in the region. Pavement will be replaced with grass, canopy trees, walkways and play areas.

The vision for these parks arose six years ago, when residents from communities in and around Bethesda came together to support the creation of additional open green space. Thousands of signatures were collected on a petition calling for more parks. We agreed that Bethesda could and should support additional density -- and it has. But we also believed that this additional density had to be matched by additional open space. And we identified the 4 surface parking lots -- two in East Bethesda and the two near the Farm Women's Market -- as the most practical means of securing this vision. Our vision is your vision, as well: The need for exactly such additional open space has been highlighted in the "Thrive" County master plan that this Council has just approved.

Now is the time to turn this vision into reality. Progress has been made. The developers, The Bernstein Management Corporation, and EYA, have developed a sketch plan that is enthusiastically endorsed by the communities. A new underground garage would replace most of the existing surface parking, and approximately 2 and ½ acres of new urban parkland would be created. The developers are now ready to undertake the preconstruction work and launch the project.

But the predicate for this is a credible financial plan committed to by the engaged parties. Of the nearly \$28 million required, the developers are committing \$8 million, most of which is the density they are purchasing to build on a portion of the parking lot behind the Market. The State of Maryland is committing \$3.5 million. And the Town of Chevy Chase is committing \$4.5 million. We are pleased to make this contribution to this project outside of our Town, for the greater good of greater Bethesda.

We now ask for the County Council to demonstrate its commitment by providing the remaining funding required. The \$2.5 million proposed from the Parks Department's funds will come from Park Impact Payment receipts -- which represents money from developers in Bethesda, and

which must be spent on parks in Bethesda. The County is being asked for \$9.225 million from general resources, a fair and balanced request representing 1/3rd of the total required for these parks. It is a vital amount for this Public-Private Partnership, and vital that the commitment be made now.

I want to close by expressing our thanks to so many who have helped this project to this critical juncture: The developers who have shown tenacity and creativity; the partners who have worked so long for this project, including the DOT led by Chris Conklin and the Parks Department led by Mike Riley; County Executive Elrich, who has supported the creation of these parks and backed the communities in the effort to realize the significant size of the parks ultimately represented in the sketch plan; the Planning Board and former Chair Casey Anderson, who put in place the innovative Park Impact Payment mechanism; and to three members of this body: Councilmember Friedson, who has been a staunch champion; and also to two Councilmembers who sat as colleagues 6 years ago: former Councilmember Roger Berliner, and you, Councilmember Riemer. Your leadership led the Council to make the critical change in the language of the Bethesda Downtown Plan that memorialized the importance of creating these parks. Without that change, there would have been no sightlines for our vision.

Thank you, all.