

MMPA Testimony – Randy Gibson 1/25/2024

Greetings Council Members, my name is Randy Gibson, Takoma Park Council Member for Ward 3. In November's Council meeting I voted against the draft Minor Master Plan. I am asking you to also vote against the current Plan or delay it for further study. A more targeted and equitable plan with zoning tailored to limit adverse impacts should be the goal. My critique of the Plan stems from the intensive scale of its upzoning with potential negative impacts on equity, traffic, and the environment.

1) Equity: Proposed Maple Avenue zoning includes significant increases in height, floor area ratios, and 100% commercial uses. This is an already densely populated area, home to a high proportion of low-income immigrants, the elderly and minorities. It is safe and affordable thanks to Takoma Park's rent stabilization. The scale of upzoning threatens this area by increasing property values, the likelihood of market driven buyouts, and the potential displacement of current renters. Why is this dense neighborhood, in no proximity of a transit station, targeted to bear a disproportionate share of new development? A Planning Board promised equity report never materialized. To make an informed decision, I ask you to require an equity analysis.

2) Traffic: The Planning Board's traffic statement found "transportation infrastructure at the Policy Area to be adequate for the density recommended in the Silver Spring Plan." This completely ignores the localized impacts of a potential 3500 more residents and their vehicles. Impacts would be felt at: 1) the intersection of East-West Hwy and Maple Avenue, (2) Carroll and Flower Avenues, and (3) Sligo Creek Parkway, among others. These two-lane streets may have already reached their carrying capacities. Clearly, local transportation infrastructure impacts could be disruptive and costly. Please require a localized traffic impact study.

3) Environment: A Climate Assessment was only just recently released. Please consider additional time for a third-party review. Takoma Park is a leader on climate issues, and the absence of a climate assessment was one reason for my no vote. Regarding the assessment, I quote from Takoma Park resident and environmental scientist Paul Chrostowski, "It is not hard to see that, even with the somewhat rosy assumptions (like assuming construction will not release GHG) here, this assessment predicts a 78% increase in GHG emissions over the project lifetime..." While recommending additional review time, I would also ask that the assessment include data on current conditions in the policy area.

In summary, City Council concerns included: no net loss of affordable housing, displacement, traffic, and environmental impacts, none of which have been adequately answered. I ask you to reject the current Plan or require an equity analysis, a localized traffic study, and third-party review of the Environmental Assessment. I am asking for your due diligence.

Thank you for your consideration,

Randy Gibson
City of Takoma Park
Ward 3 Council Member