

TESTIMONY OF THE GREATER CAPITAL AREA ASSOCIATION OF REALTORS® BEFORE THE MONTGOMERY COUNTY COUNCIL

Regarding the Great Seneca Master Plan

June 12, 2024

My name is Zac Trupp, and I am testifying today on behalf of the Greater Capital Area Association of REALTORS® (GCAAR). Not only for the 11,000 REALTORS®, property managers, title attorneys, and other real estate professionals we usually represent, but for our “brick-and-mortar” business covered by this master plan. We speak today to express our support for the draft plan as presented by the Montgomery County Planning Department.

GCAAR is the primary tenant of our 58,000 square feet, but our footprint is only a quarter of the building. We currently have five other tenants: a credit union, a childcare center, a title company, an IT firm, and a consulting company. We care deeply about the future of this area on behalf of our tenants, but also for our members who frequent our building for events, classes, and to pick-up their lockboxes and other on-the-job materials.

Located at 15201 Diamondback Drive, GCAAR falls under the “Life Sciences Center” area of the plan. The dynamic nature of the plan is clear: it seeks to further enhance our county’s effort to foster a burgeoning life sciences industry, while addressing the need for holistic live/work community around both our business and residential populations.

While our building is over two-thirds full, we are struggling to fill the remaining space. Two issues that we have faced in attracting new tenants are the number of amenities and lack of transportation options currently present. While we have commercial areas within driving distance, the walkability of this community is minimal. These two missing pieces, especially when coupled together, make attracting new tenants more difficult.

It is heartening to see the plan address these two areas. It acknowledges the dearth of amenity options and seeks to create a more complete, “15-minute” community. And there are much needed dedicated transit lanes, a better network of both roads and bikeways, as well a vision for future accessibility as the community grows.

As was articulated at the Planning Board’s presentation yesterday, there is acute awareness of the deepening housing crisis we find ourselves in. GCAAR testified in favor of Thrive 2050’s vision for more housing, and this plan helps move us towards that goal. If we truly want to ensure the growth of the life sciences industry, as well as reverse the worsening economic headwinds our county faces, we need more action like this plan that not only invites but incentivizes impactful growth.

We look forward to watching the plan make its way through the Council and towards implementation. Thank you again for your efforts to grow Montgomery County and build a welcoming place for all. Please do not hesitate to reach out if myself or our association can be helpful in any way.