

To: OZAH@MontgomeryCountyMD.gov

Subject: Local Map Amendment H-149, Glenmont Forest Apartments Rezoning
COMMUNITY CONCERNS

ATTN: Kathleen Byrne, Hearing Examiner
Office of Zoning & Administrative Hearings

From: Linda Bidlack, 2020 Wallace Ave and other Wallace Ave signatories (see below)

June 11, 2024

I and the other signatories to this letter are homeowners on Wallace Ave. I personally live directly across the street from one corner of the apartment complex, so this project will DIRECTLY affect my property value socially, economically and aesthetically for many years to come. I and each of the residents listed below wish to be identified as parties of record in the official record of this case.

While I very much agree that there is a housing shortage in our county and that development should be done near transit hubs and metro stations, I am VERY concerned about the way that the impact to our traffic, schools, crime, and the pastoral nature of our dead end street is being driven through the Planning Board by men in fancy suits who have every reason to benefit from increasing the density to the maximum at Glenmont Forest, who did NOT address the concerns of my neighbor Leo Villages who testified to our concerns recently, so more of us are getting involved.

CHANGING THE ZONING DESIGNATION

Taking my concerns one at a time, as a resident in the Staff Defined Neighborhood (Figure 2, Montgomery Planning Staff Report), I understand that this rezoning request has been filed under the land use zoning device identified as a "**floating zone**", which will allow greater flexibility to the landowner in the use of a parcel of land. According to the Guide to Maryland Zoning Decisions, by Stanley D. Abrams, these floating zone requests must be carefully considered and adopted with safeguards to ensure compatibility with the surrounding neighborhood and to assess whether they are in the public interest. Existing uses in the neighborhood must be studied objectively before reaching any decision.

We have also learned that the power to regulate density is a legitimate exercise of the police powers utilized in zoning, since the character of a neighborhood and the quality and lifestyle conceived for it are determined by the density of development. It is our belief that this development as conceived would impose greater demand on police due to the substantial increase in vehicular and pedestrian traffic, as well as the greater density of renters in an area of already high transience. This will greatly affect the ability of the Kennedy cluster of schools to safely and effectively educate growing numbers of children in close quarters. I do not understand WHY a floating zone is appropriate at this time, which will give us far less leverage in the future, and it feels like the county and these developers are trying to make this change too fast and without being honest about the full repercussions 5-10-30 years in the future, especially when there is a full shopping center across the street which DESPERATELY needs development and is an eyesore at this time..

TRAFFIC AND PEDESTRIAN SAFETY

This morning at 7:05 my husband tried to drive up to Starbucks which is normally a 3-minute drive. There was already so much traffic on Glenallen Ave it took him 15 minutes to turn left at

Exhibit 51
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the bottom of Wallace and then left on Randolph Rd, and more time to get to the store. We all know that Randolph is a very busy artery and that the underpass has made a huge difference. But a great many cars take a left from Kemp Mill onto Glenallen as a short cut to west-going Randolph Road and come speeding around the corner just below Wallace Ave. Whenever I cross there, no matter what time of day, I fear for my life from the speeding cars coming around that blind corner. We need speed bumps installed on that part of Glenallen, as children of all ages catch the school buses at our corner right there, and we all must run across when we take walks, to be sure to avoid speeding cars.

Further, if the apartment development proceeds at the currently planned density, the number of kids walking to Glenallen Elementary and Kennedy High School will increase an estimated FIVE TIMES over the number currently coming from the apartments now. There are crossing guards at the corner of Glenallen and Randolph both morning and afternoon already, thank goodness, but there was also a multiple car pileup at that light about 4 months ago, which I heard from my porch, right before school started in the morning!

In addition, at the recent Planning Board meeting, not a single person from the developer team or Board addressed our neighbor Leo Villages's testimony about our concerns about the proposed cut through of Erskine Ave and its connection to Wallace. All we have heard so far is that the EXISTING second entrance to Randolph will not be allowed by Montgomery County Transportation, with NO explanation as to why!! It is already there!! Why would it be demolished in this new plan?? And how would the estimated number of cars coming out of the complex via Erskine be managed, since Glenallen is a steep hill turning onto it from Randolph Rd; it's likely there would be backups on Randolph and worse backups on Glenallen than there already are.

The County has a goal of ZERO pedestrian deaths. The number of pedestrians to the Glenmont Shopping Center and the Glenmont Metro would skyrocket. Why not add apartments at the Shopping Center as soon as possible; a plan has been developed and this would involve fewer pedestrians across busy Randolph Rd.

TRANSIENCE ALREADY A PROBLEM IN THE KENNEDY HIGH SCHOOL CLUSTER

The proposed plan for the Glenmont Forest Apartments would increase the number of school students. Of course growth is to be expected and, if done thoughtfully, to be welcomed. However, our cluster already has many transient residents who rent housing nearby. When my two sons went to Glenallen Elementary in the 1990's, we had an International Festival, and over 60 different countries were represented, a real thrill to me since I love to travel and once lived in Haiti myself. At the time the school was outstanding, even with many children helped by the school lunch program and ESL support. However, once my oldest son got close to graduating from 5th grade we decided to move, as violence at the middle school and high school was well known to us. In the last month two incidents at Kennedy High School are evidence that this problem has only gotten worse:

(<https://moco360.media/2024/06/07/brawl-at-kennedy-high-graduation-an-embarrassment-to-our-community-principal-says>; <https://moco360.media/2024/04/29/video-of-trespasser-with-knife-at-kennedy-high-raises-alarm-about-school-safety/>).

While school violence has increased everywhere, home ownership has been shown to boost investment in local communities. According to the US Census, the percent of housing in Montgomery County that is owner occupied is 65.5%. In Silver Spring, it is only 37.7%; this project as currently proposed will add to the renter population.

IMPACT ON CRIME AND POLICING

According to the last annual police report, covering 2022, response times by police has gone from 7 minutes to 9 minutes in the past 10 years. 30% of positions in the Department are vacant. The load on police remains high (see Moco360 citations above). Stolen vehicles, aggravated assaults, sex trafficking, and gangs are all issues in our county, and transience makes this worse.

THE FORESTED NATURE OF OUR NEIGHBORHOOD

Finally, the most valuable aspect of this street is the greenery. My husband and I often say that turning up Wallace Ave is like going back in time to 1960 in terms of quiet and safe streets. It is worth protecting, and one reason I love living here is because how quiet and peaceful it is. I wish everyone could live like this and we are aware of our privilege, but we have worked hard for it. The future residents of the Glenmont Forest complex don't know about the 100+ trees that are slated for removal or the trees slated to be removed along Glenallen Ave, which is tragic. We want the green space between Wallace and the new development to be COMPLETELY PROTECTED, with just one exception, which I will mention below. I very much appreciate that in the current design that there is an effort to step down the height of the proposed buildings as they get closer to Wallace; that is very, very important. We propose that there be a tasteful and tall wall built between the two properties that will not disturb any of the current forest. We understand that some extra trees will be planted in the run-off management area, but they will take many years to grow to a height to mitigate the run-off. One neighbor had to sue the development company, after his letters about the erosion to his yard for years with NO response, and he had to finally sue the company before they did anything about the run-off. It was a great expense to him. Judging by that experience I do not have confidence that the developer will properly plan for the impact of the increased grading and pavement to the nearby houses on Wallace Ave, despite what the plans say.

Thank you for your kind attention and careful planning to date. We the undersigned stand ready to continue to be in conversation with the planners, developers, school system, and transportation and planning systems to find the sweet spot that balances all of these competing interests and priorities.

Linda Bidlack

June 11, 2024

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[Signature]
I support our neighborhood
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