

December 13, 2020

Mr. Eric Willis

Property Acquisition

MCDOT

100 Edison Park Drive, 4th Floor

Gaithersburg, MD 20878

Re: Abandonment of Portions of Westbard Avenue and Ridgefield Road in
Bethesda, AB773

Dear Mr. Willis:

I am writing this in support of the abandonment of portions of Westbard Avenue and Ridgefield Road in Bethesda as the first step in the realignment of Westbard Avenue.

In 2014, when the charettes began for the Westbard Sector Plan, I was president of the Springfield Civic Association. As the charettes unfolded, residents of the 5500 block of Westbard Avenue (between Ridgefield Road and River Road), a part of the Springfield community, complained to me be about the high volume of traffic on their street.

This volume had been increasing over the past several years thanks to the widespread use of GPS, allowing drivers to figure out alternative routes to get to their destinations. The 5500 block of Westbard Avenue is the alternative route to driving one block further east, to the corner of River Road and Ridgefield Road, turning right up Ridgefield Road for one block and then turning left to meet up with southbound Westbard Avenue that goes to Massachusetts Avenue. By turning right onto Westbard Avenue at River Road drivers avoid one traffic light and a left-hand turn, maybe cutting off three to five minutes of their commute.

I say, "commute" because Westbard Avenue, like Goldsboro Road, Little Falls Parkway and Western Avenue is another connector between River Road, where

there's an exit from the Beltway, and Massachusetts Avenue, which heads southeast to downtown D.C. Many of the drivers who use the Westbard Avenue route are commuters from other parts of Montgomery County and Virginia.

In addition to the increasing volume of traffic on Westbard Ave, I knew firsthand about turning issues at the corner of eastbound River Road onto Ridgefield Road. There were several times when I was waiting in the left lane at a red signal at Ridgefield Road and River Road, to turn westbound onto River Road when a tractor-trailer would start to make the right-hand turn from eastbound River Road to go up Ridgefield Road and made a delivery at the Westbard shopping center. The tractor-trailer would be headed right towards me and my vehicle. With a vehicle in front of me and one behind me, I couldn't move out of the way to give the tractor-trailer the clearance it needed until my signal turned green. Tractor-trailers and even school buses cannot easily make that right-hand turn from River Road. Neighbors on Westbard Avenue told me that because of this problem with the turn, many of these trucks and school buses make the right-hand turn from eastbound River Road onto their block as they have more clearance and the drivers are less likely to face heavy oncoming traffic.

As I and other community members talked with the planners about alleviating these traffic issues, especially in light of increased traffic that would result because of the redevelopment of Westwood I and II and other parcels along Ridgefield Road and Westbard Avenue, Equity One, then the developer of the property, was talking to the planners about a "gateway" into the Westwood I development. The only problem with the current "gateway" is that Ridgefield Road, is actually a gateway into the Springfield community, extending at least a mile into the community.

Since the charettes were held in Westwood II, which sits between River Road and Westbard Avenue along Ridgefield Road, the planners had a bird's-eye view of the traffic issues described above. At the same time, understanding the developer's desire, the planners suggested a solution: realignment of Westbard Avenue. This may have been the first and only time during the Westbard Sector Plan discussions that the developer and the community agreed to a solution to a problem.

By realigning Westbard Avenue, residents of the 5500 block get protection from high traffic volume, which is only expected to increase as redevelopment gets underway, and the developer, now Regency, gets its gateway.

From the time realignment was suggested until the Westbard Sector Plan was approved by the County Council, my neighbors and I spoke with the planners, county council members and staff to ensure this would be a part of the sector plan. As a note, I should add, that to further protect the residents of the 5500 block of Westbard Avenue from increased traffic, after Westbard Avenue is realigned, they may petition the county to have the River Road end of the street closed off – except for emergency vehicles – to prevent further cut through traffic.

Since abandoning parts of Westbard Avenue and Ridgefield Road is the first step to realignment of Westbard Avenue and to alleviating the traffic issues that plague the 5500 block, I am in full support of this measure.

Sincerely,

Phyllis Edelman

Past President, 2014-2017

Springfield Civic Association

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