

June 11, 2024

TO: County Executive Marc Elrich
CC: Montgomery County Planning Board Members
Montgomery County Council Members

RE: Support for proposed development of housing at Ellsworth Place

Dear County Executive Elrich, Planning Board members, and Council Members:

The Silver Spring Citizens Advisory Board (SSCAB) is pleased to submit this letter of support for the proposed development of housing at Ellsworth Place by Avante Ellsworth Venture I, LLC, c/o GBT Realty Corporation (see [May 2024 update to Sketch Plan No. 320240060](#)). SSCAB met with representatives of GBT Realty in December 2023 to learn about the project and ask questions. The additional information now available from the Planning Board's staff report affirms our support for this much-needed housing in Downtown Silver Spring (DTSS).

The proposal calls for up to 450 residential apartments, 15 percent of which would be Moderately Priced Dwelling Units (MPDUs) per the County's Inclusionary Zoning policy. Reasons for our support include:

- **Silver Spring, especially the area within SSCAB's footprint, needs more rental housing in order to slow the growth of rents.** Montgomery County's renters are in a housing crisis, with fully half paying more for their housing than they can afford. This problem is especially acute in Silver Spring, where a higher than average proportion of our neighbors are renters.
- **Our area is desperately in need of more below-market rent options such as MPDUs** to serve our economically diverse population. We all value the diversity of Silver Spring, and that requires more housing that our neighbors can afford based on their incomes.
- **This project will contribute positively to the County's climate change mitigation goals through increased density, proximity to transit, and limited new parking spots.** SSCAB has long supported these goals and advocated for new housing development to play a bigger role in meeting our climate goals. We support the Planning Department staff's condition – laid out in the sketch plan report linked above – to incorporate Bird-Safe Design elements. We strongly support the inclusion of bicycle parking and encourage the developers to consider providing access to charging stations for e-bikes.

- **We are enthusiastic that construction will mostly not restrict people’s movement around the site or access to Ellsworth Place businesses.** DTSS has been under perpetual construction for more than 20 years now. That delivers immense benefits to those of us who live and work here, but it can be frustrating. This project’s unique ability to build atop an existing building is appealing. We support the Planning Department staff’s condition that the developer conduct a noise analysis.
- **This project would contribute to DTSS’s and the wider Silver Spring Urban District’s strength and vibrancy.** This area’s success as an economic engine for our area, as well as a jobs center, space for community events, and nightlife destination depends on a robust, growing population.

SSCAB members also expressed some reservations. We share these reservations not to undermine our support for the Ellsworth Place housing development, but to encourage the Planning Board and the firms developing the site to consider these issues as the process moves forward:

- **Accessibility.** We want to see this building go “above and beyond” on accessibility. As one of the older urban centers in Montgomery County, much of our housing is inaccessible to disabled people and older residents. We encourage the developers to implement universal design and accessibility best practices in every aspect of this construction, and urge them to consider using the development as an opportunity for model accessible housing. If Planning Department staff or members of the developer’s team would like to speak to SSCAB members with disabilities about our perspective, we would be happy to connect.
- **Parking.** Members of the CAB have different views. Some strongly prefer that few, if any, new parking spots be included, and be designated for disabled drivers or provide electric vehicle charging stations. Others are concerned that adding the maximum number of units will make parking harder for shoppers and workers.
- **Three-bedroom apartments.** We know that the plan does not yet include a specific number of apartments or their composition. We encourage the developers to include three-bedroom homes for families, something that very few of the newest multifamily developments here have provided.
- **Energy efficiency and green building practices.** We support the Planning Department staff’s provisions in the most recently approved sketch plan.

Finally, we ask that Planning Department staff share this feedback with the appropriate people on the developer’s team.

Thank you for your consideration of our overall support for this project and our limited concerns. We look forward to continuing to work with the Planning Department staff – as well as the County Executive, where relevant – as this development moves toward final approval in 2024 and 2025. If you have any questions for members of the SSCAB, or to speak to members with

disabilities about housing accessibility, please contact the County staff to the SSCAB, Nahom Tekle (nahom.tekle@montgomerycountymd.gov).

Sincerely,

Members of the Silver Spring Citizens Advisory Board