

THE MARYLAND GENERAL ASSEMBLY
20TH LEGISLATIVE DISTRICT

June 18, 2014

Tom Downs
Chair, Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA)
600 Fifth Street, NW
Washington, DC 20001

Dear Chairman Downs:

We are writing to urge the WMATA Board to schedule action on approval of the report for the Compact Hearing on the Takoma Park Metro development only after there has been more comprehensive consideration of the concerns that have been raised about how the proposed development will affect the adjacent residential neighborhoods in both Maryland and Washington, DC. We are convinced that a Neighborhood Design Working Group, launched by EYA and representatives of affected neighborhoods in cooperation with the Board, would ensure balanced consideration of neighbors' concerns and their ideas about how to make the development a success for the whole community.

While we have been--and remain--very supportive of residential development at the Takoma Metro site, we are concerned that the project has not yet been subjected to a level of review sufficient to ensure that the Board has all information necessary to move to final approval. As elected officials in Maryland, we believe, for several reasons, that it would be premature for WMATA to take action at this point that would send the development proposal to the District of Columbia's Planned Unit Development (PUD) process.

First, D.C.'s PUD process is one in which Maryland has limited formal involvement, despite the significant impact that this plan will have on Maryland residents. Thus, the Board's current deliberative process marks the point at which Marylanders have the best remaining opportunity to provide genuine input. If the Board were to approve the Compact Hearing Report now, you would in effect be referring the proposal to the local Washington, D.C. process before many key details have been adequately aired. We want to make sure that the thoughtful views of Marylanders on the important unresolved questions will be heard in the process.

Second, EYA has recently stated in a letter to our community that the "process will take a number of years to complete and we are in the very beginning stages." For precisely this reason, it is important to have serious engagement now between EYA and WMATA with the affected community. Up until this point, although many neighbors are supportive of the development, many also feel that there has been poor information sharing and a failure to interact substantively with the residents and businesses that will be most heavily affected. A number of thoughtful concerns have been raised by neighbors about the project relating to overall height, inadequate setback from local roads, reduction in the number of public parking spaces, increase in traffic, loss of green space, and more difficult access to the Metro station. These concerns have not been adequately addressed.

Moreover, many neighbors do not see why the project needs to exceed the Washington, D.C. zoning requirements or the parameters of the Takoma Central District Plan, or -- if those limits are breached -- what kind of compensating amenities or improvements the community might be able to expect. The Central District Plan, which was drawn up in 2002 as a framework to guide development in the vicinity of the Metro station, was the product of a genuinely collaborative planning effort involving the Washington, D.C. and Takoma Park governments, with broad community involvement from both jurisdictions. Other developments in the area have proceeded effectively within the parameters created by this Plan. Again, leaving all of these issues to be resolved in the PUD process would likely deny Marylanders an opportunity to have meaningful input into the decision-making process.

Finally, the availability of specific details or schematic plans of the proposal has been limited, making it difficult for interested parties to fairly assess the proposal. Although EYA has assured us that community concerns have been addressed, without the sharing of relevant design documents it is impossible to determine the extent to which any concerns may in fact have been addressed. Future engagement by either EYA or WMATA should include reasonable sharing of design details.

We recognize, of course, the important role that the D.C. Zoning Commission plays in this process, but the announcement for the Board's hearing invokes as "Factors Subject to Consideration" such matters as "land use, population, economic factors affecting development plans, existing and proposed transportation and transit facilities, any dislocation of families or businesses; preservation of the beauty and dignity of the Nation's Capital; and factors affecting environmental amenities and aesthetics and financial resources." The announcement also notes that the mass transit plan under review includes "stations and parking facilities, the character, nature, design [and] location." In other words, all the areas of concern being raised by the affected neighborhoods are on the table, and the Board should not pass the proposal along to the zoning commission without ensuring that these concerns are given a more thorough review.

Accordingly, we ask the Board, in recognition of the need for further consideration of the plan and possible changes to it, to support and encourage the establishment of a Neighborhood Design Working Group, which would include representatives from both Maryland and D.C. and which would work actively with WMATA and EYA to develop and refine a design plan that is compatible with, and supportive of, the surrounding community. The working group would meet with EYA's architects and WMATA real estate office staff, and meet in public, in order to make constructive and substantive changes to the current proposal. We hope that you will not proceed to any final action to advance the Takoma development project to the PUD process until the Working Group finishes its work under an agreed-upon deadline.

Thank you for your attention to these requests.

Very truly yours,



Senator Jamie Raskin



Delegate Sheila Hixson



Delegate Tom Hucker



Delegate Heather Mizeur