



CITY OF TAKOMA PARK, MARYLAND

April 6, 2016

Montgomery County Council Public Hearing: Fiscal Year 2017 Operating Budgets

Testimony of Peter Kovar, City Councilmember, City of Takoma Park

Good afternoon.

I represent North Takoma, where part of Montgomery College's Takoma Park/Silver Spring campus is located. Our community has serious concerns about the impact of the College's Facilities Master Plan, and I urge the Council to help us address them through the Reconciliation process.

I'm a strong supporter of MC's mission. It provides vital educational opportunities to students from lower income families, and I'm personally committed to helping the school thrive in that role.

My daughter attended MC, and a year ago my wife and I endowed a scholarship to help lower income students attend the school. I agree the Takoma campus science labs should be upgraded so area students have access to state of the art facilities.

The problem is that the Master Plan calls for all construction in the Takoma Park/Silver Spring campus over the next 8 – 10 years to occur in residential North Takoma, with no building activity in the more commercial Silver Spring part of the campus, even though MC controls open land there. The five older campus buildings would be replaced by four larger, taller structures that will crowd the neighborhood. Residents accept some construction, but they oppose this construction imbalance.

The College has not abided by a 2002 legal Agreement (attached to my testimony) it signed requiring early consultation with Takoma Park's municipal government about construction plans. There were two poorly publicized events for residents, with little information on the Master Plan. There was no consultation with the City government, despite a City Council resolution (also attached) from October asking the College to expand its outreach and share a draft of the Plan.

The Master Plan went to the MC Board in mid-December, without having been shared. This lack of consultation has prompted our City Attorney to send a letter (a copy of which is attached) stating that the College violated the 2002 Agreement. I attach a similar letter from Historic Takoma (which also signed the Agreement).

This is not just a process dispute. With consultation, we could have made a case for construction in Silver Spring, or perhaps learned why the developable parcel there is off limits.

The College and the people of North Takoma are neighbors. So it's ironic that the Master Plan inaccurately claims residents want no construction in their neighborhood, when in fact it's the College insisting that ALL construction take place there.

This misstatement of North Takoma's views, combined with no consultation, inaccurate information about the campus day care center's closure, and the College's seeming reluctance to meet with us on timely basis, all raise doubts about MC's commitment to being good neighbors.

I appreciate the language the Council recently adopted calling for a charrette process before renovation of the Math and Science Center. But that doesn't get to the underlying construction imbalance embedded in the Master Plan.

Therefore, I urge the Council – in Reconciliation -- to phase release of the Math/Science funds, as suggested by the County Executive. In addition to potentially freeing up money for other County priorities, holding off on funding this project for a year or two would create some breathing room to allow the consultation that should have happened earlier. That's a pathway to being good neighbors.

Thank you.