



OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT

August 26, 2016

Mayor Kate Stewart  
The Honorable Peter Kovar  
City of Takoma Park  
7500 Maple Avenue  
Takoma Park, MD 20912

Dear Mayor Stewart and Councilmember Kovar:

We appreciate the time you and our neighbors, along with Councilmember Marc Elrich and council staff, took to meet with us and share concerns. It certainly was a frank and robust discussion, which I hope will facilitate continued communication and positive outcomes for all concerned.

At the outset, let me share an informational item: we are taking additional steps to address the challenges of traffic and on-street parking at peak class times with the assistance of off-duty police officers from your police department. While most of the parking challenges are focused on streets just off of Fenton Street in Silver Spring, the officers will keep an eye on all the streets surrounding the campus. We are grateful for the support from the Takoma Park Police Department.

In response to your request in your letter to me, I offer a series of proposals designed to further communication, obtain feedback, and enhance transparency. Specifically, we will discuss and engage with you, our neighbors, and other stakeholders regarding several of the issues you outlined in your letter:

- Planning for the future of the area, including ways of better connecting Takoma Park, Silver Spring, and the College Campus to increase the vitality of these communities
- Proposed construction and renovation plans
- Sources of funding and financial impacts
- Opportunities for construction of College buildings in Silver Spring, including at the Burlington Avenue site owned by the College
- Building design elements
- Potential impacts on traffic (including bicycle and pedestrian traffic)
- Protection of green space and trees
- Preservation of historic homes
- Potential construction timetables and their impact on the neighborhood

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To kick off the discussions, I would like to brief the City Council at an upcoming meeting. Subsequently, Dr. Brad Stewart, the vice president and provost of the Takoma Park/Silver Spring Campus, can provide regular updates to the Council. I would also encourage regular meetings between Dr. Stewart and the mayor as has occurred in the past.

If the City so desires, we would consider the formation of an advisory committee composed of stakeholders from the nearby residences, the College, and the larger community. This committee would provide guidance on a number of issues including community engagement efforts, youth services and engagement, and campus operations.

In addition, the College is willing to host a series of three community conversations to discuss the topics listed in the points above. I suggest that we employ a professional facilitator for these meetings to enhance engagement and the full sharing of ideas, opinions, and information. The College and the City would need to agree on the timing of these conversations and some general guidelines for the conversations. The facilitator can help participants agree on meeting ground rules to ensure thoughtful dialogue.

In terms of facilities planning efforts in the future, the College commits to an enhanced timeline for deliberation of all future facilities master plans. We will commit to holding three community meetings two months in advance of the due date to the state. We will also engage a professional facilitator for these meetings to ensure that all attendees are heard and issues of concern to residents and stakeholders are given attention and reviewed.

As you know, we were directed by the County Council to utilize a charrette process as a means to engage stakeholders in the design of our new math and science building. The College has used a similar intensive engagement process for the last three buildings constructed on the east side of the campus. The Nunley Student Services Building reflects extensive input from local residents gathered during a design charrette process that involved more than 20 separate meetings and additional direct discussion with the project architects. Both the Commons Building and the Pavilion Three renovation projects also involved extensive input from local residents including direct consultation with project architects on a number of issues including exterior building finishes. Our goal is to replicate this collaborative process for the math and science building. We will hire an architect versed in the use of design charrettes and skilled in designing projects adjacent to residential and historic districts.

The mandatory referral process, as you know, will provide another opportunity for residents to provide input and feedback about the design of the math and science building. The Montgomery County Planning Department staff will review the design and the project as a whole and provide recommendations to the Montgomery County Planning Board. The board will provide notice to the public and hold a hearing about the project. The board will make a final decision about the recommendations, which are then provided to the College.

And, of course, the City provides the oversight and regulatory review for forest conservation and stormwater management. We will continue to comply with these laws and regulations.

Going forward, I ask you to consider the College from these two vantage points:

- the successful collaboration between the College, City, and our neighbors during the design and construction of three buildings either newly constructed or renovated on the Takoma Park side of the Campus, and
- the overall value the College provides to the community.

The Commons Building located at the intersection of New York Avenue and Takoma Avenue was renovated in 2009. The renovation maximized the existing footprint of the building and provided for modern classrooms. In response to feedback from the neighbors the exterior facade and the building setback was retained. A new stair tower addition was located on the interior to the Campus. The existing landscape and trees were retained and enhanced, thus minimizing the view of the building. Light and noise mitigation was implemented. The facade of the Nunley Building, the location of the curtain window, and massing towards the relocated Fenton Street away from New York Avenue were the result of the charrette process. The renovation of Pavilion Three allowed the College to modernize the facility, create much needed modern classrooms, and office space, and provide up-to-date ADA-compliant accessibility improvements. Community feedback resulted in the rain garden, the façade and paint exterior paint treatment, and the location of classrooms and offices on the interior of the building in addition to a smaller footprint. Ultimately, we are proud of these facilities, inside and out, because they meet the needs of the students, the residents and the taxpayers.

I want to note the College did succeed in placing the bulk of the much needed expansion of this Campus in South Silver Spring over the recent decades. We did so in response to community concerns and the County's desire to facilitate the revitalization of Silver Spring. The rejuvenation of this Campus was viewed as a key component to bring life back to the downtown area and expand opportunities for down-county residents. In fact, the majority of the Campus' square footage is now on the west campus on Georgia Avenue. After much deliberation in 1998, the community and decision-makers agreed that the focus of the expansion would be in South Silver Spring—after rejecting proposals to expand onsite, and to leave Takoma Park. Nonetheless, it was well known that at the conclusion of the expansion effort, the renovation of the existing buildings would be required given the age and the state of disrepair of many of the buildings.

Again, I respectfully suggest you look at these renovated buildings to see that the input of the community was reflected in these buildings. In a similar manner in response to community input regarding the math and science building, the College changed the plan submitted to the state: the proposed building is now designated as three stories instead of the four stories that had been in plans for more than 12 years. In doing so, the Campus will give up its gymnasium to make room for the building. We did this to respond to neighbors' concerns about the height of the building. And, we look forward to the charrette process where other design concerns such as the scale, massing, setbacks, façade treatments, character, and other design elements can be appropriately addressed.

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Additionally, I offer that the value of the College is deeply important for the community, the County, and the City. Though I think we all agree on this point, it bears repeating. We are the affordable, high quality, locally provided postsecondary education in the County. Of the recent Montgomery County Public Schools graduates who stay in state to attend College, the majority begin their college career at Montgomery College. In particular, students from Blair, Einstein, and Springbrook high schools count on the Takoma Park/Silver Spring Campus as do students from Maple Avenue to New Hampshire Avenue. The Campus offers access to lectures, performances, art galleries, and lifelong learning to our neighbors and area residents. But, most importantly, as the demographics of our County evolve and change, it is clear that the need for your community's college grows ever stronger. Montgomery County saw the largest growth in poverty in our region over the last several years—and you know, poverty is the biggest barrier to an education. Less than eight percent of students from the lowest income quartile graduate with a baccalaureate degree within in six years of high school graduation. These efforts to encourage our residents to participate in higher education, to close the achievement gap, and to drive towards equitable outcomes are the challenges of our time. Community colleges can—and must—play a role in solving these challenges and MC will be at the forefront of this effort.

To meet these challenges, we must always balance our obligations to our neighbors, our students, and the taxpayers who support our operations and expect a return on their investment—students ready to participate in the civic life of our community and ready to fuel our economy. This means that we must provide instruction in modern facilities to help ensure the success of our students. It also means the College must maximize the use of the existing property while being respectful of our residential location. I believe strongly that in the last 20 years we have carefully and successfully balanced all three obligations—the evidence is in the quality of our buildings that reflect the input of our neighbors and our respect for the surrounding community; in our students who come to this Campus and succeed; and in the careful and considered use of the resources provided to the College. As a result, I will not ask the staff to reopen the College's 2013–2023 Facilities Master Plan.

Thank you for your patience as we deliberated your requests. I did challenge the staff to take time to review your requests, the current Facilities Master Plan as well as the previous plans, the history of this campus, the needs of our students, and the needs of the College overall.

I do look forward to working with you to deepen and strengthen our connections to advance the future of the College and the communities we serve.

Sincerely,



DeRionne P. Pollard, PhD  
President