



Town of Sykesville

7547 Main Street, Sykesville, MD 21784
p: 410.795.8959 f: 410.795.3818
townofsykesville.org

Town House

Stacy Link, Mayor
Joe Cosentini, Town Manager
Craig Weaver, Treasurer
Kerry G. Chaney, Town Clerk

January 4, 2022

Dave Bowersox
Hoffman, Comfort, Offutt, Scott & Halstad, LLP
24 North Court Street
Westminster, MD 21157

RE: Warfield – Petition for zoning text amendment

Mr. Bowersox,

The Town is in receipt of your client's petition for a zoning text amendment dated December 13, 2021 with regard to the Planned Employment Center (PEC) zoning designation on the Warfield property. Town staff has reviewed the request and would offer several comments for your client to consider prior to moving forward with the request. Your client certainly has the option to request the text amendment as is if that is their desire.

In the first paragraph under the "Request" section, it is stated that "the Applicant's proposed amendment to the zoning text would allow an increase in residential density while preserving the Applicant's ability to develop non-residential uses." This statement seems to conflict with the text amendment language itself that call for a maximum of residential uses of 75% which would allow for all new and existing structures on site to be converted to residential if they choose to do so except for the requested 5% minimum. I believe this statement or the percentages requested are in conflict and should match the Applicant's intention for the property. The same section also refers to "certain ambiguities in the existing zoning text" and the desire to clarify these ambiguities. Would the Applicant be able to expand upon what specific ambiguities exist and which proposed changes clarify these ambiguities?

The "Rationale: Project Feasibility" section mentions "experience gained from three years of marketing to non-residential users." Would the Applicant be able to share the specifics of the marketing efforts that were undertaken during their ownership and what interest they did get from these efforts? The reason for asking is that the marketing, from our understanding, seem focused exclusively on "large-scale" development. Were other options or strategies considered and can that information be shared? Specifically, were smaller potential users turned away and why? We would just like to understand the rational if this occurred.

The section further states that "Employment growth...has been tepid at best in Carrol County over the past couple of decades." Since this was known by the Applicant at purchase, what strategies did they have in mind during the lead up to the purchase that made them believe this issue could have been overcome? Similarly, the "high cost of historic rehabilitation relative to new construction" is mentioned which again was known at the purchase. Additional clarification

as to what strategies were contemplated prior to purchase and attempted to overcome this issue once ownership was transferred would help justify the requested changes to the zoning.

A funding gap of \$30M has been shared by the Applicant on several occasions. The letter submitted states that \$38M has been conditionally secured and that “a majority of the government support...is related to housing.” Can more information be provided on these programs? The Town has been told by the Department of Housing and Community Development that the 4% Low-Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) that the Applicant intends to use can be put toward some non-residential uses. It is also our understanding that historic tax credits are not restricted to residential uses. Additional information as to why the programs cannot be utilized for non-residential purposes on this project would assist in evaluating the request.

The letter references the wetlands remediation efforts for the future development of Parcels A and B “and associated town park improvement”. In the plans I’ve seen for the wetlands project, I see no park improvements proposed unless the creation of the wetlands is considered the improvement. Can the Applicant clarify this statement?

In the “Rationale: Community Benefit” section there are several references that should be expanded upon or clarified.

- Warfield being a pilot project and the “first step in the redevelopment of the Springfield Hospital Center campus”. The Warfield site is home to several previously renovated commercial structures so it is unclear how the proposed zoning text amendment would open the opportunity for a pilot project. The remaining acreage at Springfield has not been something that has been discussed for redevelopment nor is it considered a priority by the Town.
- No information is given as to how this proposal will “support local merchants” and contribute to a vibrant Main Street. Is this accomplished through the addition of more people in the surrounding area? If this is the rationale then any new residential development in the area would have a similar effect. Why is Warfield different?
- Attracting millions in state investment in Sykesville (not just Warfield) – what millions in state investment are being proposed for Sykesville? Is this new investment or part of ongoing partnerships the Town has with State agencies? Have agreements already been made? What projects are being proposed for these state investments?

There is a comment regarding consistency with the Town’s recently updated Comprehensive Plan. The Comp Plan states clearly in the pages referenced that “the Town work collaboratively with the developers of Warfield to engage in an urban design workshop to develop a new vision for the mixed-use development. The outcome of which may be used to inform future zoning.” Would the Applicant like to begin the process for scheduling an urban design workshop prior to the text amendment moving forward? Having this type of workshop would certainly help rationalize a text amendment request as it would be developed in partnership with the community.

The "Rationale: Consistent with Disposition and Development Agreement" section is particularly confusing and seems to miss the true goals and objectives of "smart growth" policies. The letter makes it seem that adding residential alone would make the project compliant with these protocols. In fact, these planning practices are far more intricate and would require significant reimagining of the entire site in order to fully comply. This is something that could be accomplished through the urban design workshop, but I do not believe this is what the Applicant truly desires. It may be best simply to eliminate this section all together from the request.

As for the specific changes requested, the movement of most conditional uses to the permitted category is straight forward enough and most of these I have left for review by the Planning Commission. That said, the addition of "Retirement homes and senior housing facilities" which I presume to be an age-restricted housing products, to the Office, research, institutional, and light industrial category makes them eligible to count toward the required non-residential component. I'm not sure this is the desired intent of the request, but it will appear as if this would allow the non-residential component of the project to be met with a largely residential use.

Finally, the changes to the required percentages of land uses seem off. If non-residential is listed at no less than 5% and open space is listed at no less than 25% then the residential component couldn't be more than 70%. The request is for 75%. We also understand the request to increase the density from 2 units per acre to 6.5 units per acre. This would increase the total number of allowable residential units from 182 to 592, assuming my math is correct, with 145 units already approved at Parkside. With the remaining acreage open for building being less than 30 acres, is it even physically possible to fit this number of additional units in the project taking into account grading, storm water, and other utility requirements? Basically, I'm wondering if the increase in density of this magnitude is even necessary.

Please let me know if you would like to discuss this prior to the amendment request moving forward. I am glad to set aside some time to work with you and the Applicant on any revisions they would want to consider.

Sincerely,



Joe Cosentini
Town Manager