

December 2, 2010

Ms. Françoise Carrier, Chair
Montgomery County Planning Board
Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission
8787 Georgia Avenue
Silver Spring, Md. 20910-3760

RE: Potential Opening of Buehler Road in Olney, Maryland

Dear Ms. Carrier and Members of the Planning Board:

I am here on behalf of the Greater Olney Civic Association which represents over 40,000 people in Olney. After much debate and deliberation, we have voted to oppose the potential opening that has been proposed for Buehler Road.

For the record, the entire Olney community is very excited about the proposed new state-of-the art Safeway Store. Their plans have been scrutinized by not only our community but yourselves as well. The Local Area Traffic Review (LATR) and Policy Area Mobility Review (PAMR) have been completed and reviewed by all applicable government agencies. The July 29, 2010 Traffic Impact Study (TIS) was reviewed with the following comments from a September 13, 2010 letter composed by Mr. Gregory M. Leck, Manager of the Development Review Team, of the Montgomery County Department of Transportation: "...all studied intersections will have acceptable post-development Critical Lane Volumes that do not exceed the area congestion standard". We are not experts in the field of traffic study or development review - however our understanding of this September 13th letter leads us to believe that current roads are acceptable. This September 13, 2010 letter further states that the PAMR requirement necessitates 10 percent of the peak hour trips be mitigated which makes the PAMR mitigation requirement for this project 14 trips. As we all know, Safeway is willing to make a "Mitigation Payment" to satisfy the PAMR requirements. This "Mitigation Payment" is expected to be approximately \$ 154,000. ***Mr. Leck's September 13th letter states "We recommend the applicant be allowed to contribute that fee to help support pedestrian safety improvement projects within the policy area". Our community believes that the Transportation Planning Division has made a serious mistake in recommending Buehler Road be opened.***

Many past and current leaders of GOCA are very familiar with the **2005 Olney Master Plan** as these Olney residents were a significant part of the citizen group that participated in the revision of this plan. While we may understand that the opening of Buehler Road is recommended in the Master Plan, as previously stated we are in complete disagreement with the Transportation Planning Division and its recommendation. A review of the July 2003 Public Hearing Draft and subsequent Staff Draft of the Olney Master Plan reveal the wishes of the Olney community. These documents clearly state the following: ***"Since the Buehler Road connection is not a critical part of the roadway in and around the Town Center, and connecting Buehler Road would encourage Town Center traffic to travel through the residential communities on Buehler Road and King William Drive, the unbuilt portion of Buehler Road should not be used for vehicular traffic."*** These documents further state ***"Buehler Road does provide a valuable Town Center connection for pedestrians and bicycles from the adjoining residential communities"***.

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The community recommendation with agreement from Park and Planning Staff was to retain the right-of-way for an "off -road shared use path". In 2004, The Planning, Housing, and Economic Development Committee of the Montgomery County Council held hearings on the Transportation Elements of the Olney Master Plan. Those hearings favored retaining the connection for Buehler Road per the 1980 Master Plan, **contrary** to the Olney community recommendations per the July 2003 Public Hearing Draft. The 2004 Council Staff Report on the Olney Master Plan transportation elements mentions that analysis performed by the Planning Board "shows that if Buehler Road were connected, it would produce modest relief for Spartan Road/Georgia Avenue intersection." This report further states that "even if Buehler Road were connected, it would still serve only a neighborhood collector function, not as a means for through traffic". The November 18, 2010 Staff Report prepared by Sandra Pereira certainly seems to contradict this staff report. **Again, we feel connecting Buehler Road is an inappropriate recommendation.**

The 2005 Olney Master Plan has the following goal for Olney Town Center: "Create an economically healthy, attractive, pedestrian-oriented, and well connected Town Center to be the commercial and civic heart of the community". The plan also identifies Safeway as being located in the Southeast Quadrant. Ms. Pereira's report states: "...the road connection will provide enhanced neighborhood transportation connectivity". Based on the severe economic downturn in Montgomery County and our whole country, we must ask what is the urgency for this connectivity? The Master Plan notes "...the Town Center...needs...unique landscaping or pedestrian oriented streets with special character that would help create a sense of place" - this "mitigation payment" will certainly be a great step in realizing these Master Plan goals. We would hardly expect \$ 154,000 would be enough to make this road connect, but could certainly be used for pedestrian improvements as suggested by the Olney Town Center Advisory Committee in their letter of November 1, 2010. Additionally, the September 20, 2010 letter from Safeway to Ms. Pereira also recommends this "Mitigation Fee" be used for pedestrian improvements. In view of the county's current fiscal situation, spending money on this road connection would be improper.

GOCA has great respect for the 2005 Olney Master Plan. We have worked to defend its decisions and we're proud of our effort in helping to craft this document and the future of Olney. **Today, we feel just as we did in 2003 - Buehler Road should remain closed and should remain a valuable Town Center connection for pedestrians and bicycles.** The true spirit of the Master Plan of having "unique landscaping, pedestrian oriented streets with special character" can only exist by keeping Buehler Road closed.

Thank you very much for allowing me this opportunity to express the views of the residents of Camelback Village, Hallowell, The Highlands of Olney, and the citizens of Olney.

Sincerely,

Matt Zaborsky

Matt Zaborsky
President