

September 8, 2011

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

RE: First Baptist Church of Wheaton - Preliminary Plan 120100250 and Site Plan 820100080

Dear Chairman Carrier:

We are here today to convey the interests of the Olney community regarding the plans being discussed. We mirror the worries of the immediate neighborhood along Emory Church Road and voice the very deep concerns of the entire Olney community.

Although the church as we all know does have lawful rights to construct a new building, we wish to protect the many citizens and homeowners who understandably feel their rights are being ignored by the plans before you. The Greater Olney Civic Association (GOCA) encourages you to carefully consider these factors before rendering a final decision:

***The high level of imperviousness this church will bring to the community and its effect***  
***The proposed size of this building on a small rural roadway***  
***The intent of the Olney Master Plan***  
***The sense of the Olney community***  
***The future of development in our community***

First, the Olney Master Plan mentions numerous times that development in the Southeast area should be minimal to preserve local water quality. We strongly feel that this proposed PIF (Private Institutional Facility) with parking for approximately 200 cars will create a level of imperviousness that is simply too high - we realize the Master Plan does not contain a specific percentage for a limit of imperviousness however it was recommended during the 2005 revision. While we realize they have worked hard to reduce the level to approximately 17% - that is well above anything considered "minimal". The Olney Master Plan specifically states "new sewer lines should not be extended along tributaries in the western portion of the Batchellors Forest Tributary above the ICC right-of-way because environmental benefits would not outweigh the potential impacts to the stream". **Many current property owners along Emory Church Road have expressed a very valid concern for the quality of their well water** if this PIF were built. We would encourage a surety bond be posted by this PIF to assuage the residents fears. Our research has revealed that it could take as long as 5 years for homeowners to feel the effects on their wells of run-off from a parking lot the size of what is being proposed.

Second, a proposed 46,500 square foot church (or a place of worship) with 788 seats is simply too large for Emory Church Road. As the staff report points out - this road is a secondary residential street with a rolling terrain and this street has a rural character. **We strongly believe this road is not appropriate for this development or ANY type of proposed PIF (i.e. a school).** We would also like to point out that the June 28, 2011 letter written by Gregory Leck to Mr. Neil Braunstein

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contains 18 conditions (many regarding Emory Church Road) in their recommendation to approve the Preliminary Plan. Mr. Leck notes several instances where this road may have to be widened and the repercussions this would cause. He specifically states "to minimize the impact of the variable sod shoulder and the concrete sidewalk on existing trees....allow the sidewalk to meander around those trees". As we have stated, the nature of this road and the existence of many very large Champion Trees renders this road and site a most inappropriate place for this Church.

Third, the meaning of the Olney Master Plan (OMP). As we are all aware, recommendations in Master Plans are only a guide for the future. GOCA has a very long and distinguished record of defending the Olney Master Plan and many of our current members were very instrumental in the 2005 revision. You all have heard on many occasions that this proposed development is not in keeping with the 2005 OMP. **There is no doubt that the 2005 OMP is very specific regarding no public sewer service for this property.** As you will hear from David Reile and Barbara Sudduth who reside right next door at 3100 Emory Church Road have informed us they were expressly informed when they bought their home in 2007 that *they were not eligible for public sewer service*. The County Council very clearly stated on April 8, 2008 (resolution 16-500) "advancement to W-3 and S -3 conditioned on the Planning Board's approval of a Preliminary Plan that conforms to the intent of the Olney Master Plan". We certainly understand that PIF's have rights, but we firmly believe the Montgomery County policy does not apply here because when the Council rendered their decision on this particular water sewer category change request they did not know the adjacent properties were ineligible for public sewer service. As the Board is aware "for new PIF uses service category amendments may be approved for sites only where required water and/or sewer main extensions *will abut only properties which are otherwise eligible for community service....*". This is not the case with this proposed development and we believe the meaning of the Olney Master Plan leaves no doubt about this project. For the record, during the the 2005 OMP work sessions many citizens in the Olney community wanted to make this Southeast Quadrant of Olney an SPA (Special Protection Area) and our community was assured that designation was not necessary because of the low density zoning.

Fourth, the sense and spirit of the Olney community has come under question during our opposition to this proposed plan. Presently, Olney is home to well over a dozen churches and they are all located along Georgia Avenue and Route 108 (Olney-Sandy Spring Road) the main streets of Olney. They are easily accessible, have sufficient parking, and are terrific supporters of the Olney community. No doubt, the First Baptist Church of Wheaton has a good record of service to the Wheaton community. As we have mentioned and many, many citizens and adjoining property owners have testified - no one in our community is "anti-church". Perhaps a more accurate description would be "anti PIF". For the record, Olney has 3 facilities serving seniors under construction along major roads - not in the middle of an established neighborhood. It is very interesting to note that the *Shaare Tefila Synagogue* was built on Georgia Avenue, approximately one mile from this proposed development. We must question why the church had indicated they had trouble finding land along the Georgia Avenue corridor when this facility was just completed. The website for the church displays a page called "future" and several church members have indicated they had contacted neighbors to introduce themselves and let them know about their planned house of worship. We have contacted several property owners along Emory Church Road and we have great concern as no one can corroborate this claim. Many people are labeling Olney as a unwelcoming community, which is not only wrong but insulting.

Fifth, Olney's thoughts on the future of development in our community. In accord with Olney Master Plan, we are a satellite community. People have moved here accepting that fact and we have many citizens who commute to the District of Columbia, Bethesda, Gaithersburg, and Northern Virginia. We have never been intended to be self-sufficient with enough density and mass to function on our own. Olney is a housing resource, as the Master Plan says and people have come to live here knowing they may have some inconvenience in getting to jobs and services if they desire to have a semi-rural suburban lifestyle. We are a very desirable community according to the realtor community, have great schools, and were considered the 17th best place to live in the United States just a couple of years ago.

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There has been extensive speculation that the interests of our community may be second to those of Wheaton and we certainly hope that is not the case. We understand the desires of Wheaton wanting to redevelop and the overall economic needs of Montgomery County in pushing for changes in Wheaton, however we respectfully remind the Board, not at the expense of our beloved community. Just imagine the ramifications if all large properties in this watershed were to develop as this proposed plan indicates - the headwaters of the Northwest Branch would be destroyed.

Currently, there is property for sale at the corner of Briars Road and Olney-Laytonsville Road (Route 108). This would be a perfect location for this church and we would encourage them to look at this land. In the event, the church is determined to build on Emory Church Road - we would very strongly urge them to build a much smaller facility that could be supported by a septic system. Their conditional approval indicates this building can only be used one day per week - why do they need such a large building?

On behalf of GOCA and the Olney community - we want to thank the Board very much for your consideration of our thoughts.

For the past, present, and future of Olney we respectfully request these plans be denied.

Sincerely Yours,

*Matt Zaborsky*

Matt Zaborsky  
President