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July 31, 2015

Office of the County Executive  
Executive Office Building (EOB)  
101 Monroe Street, 2nd Floor  
Rockville, Maryland 20850

Subject: GOCA recommendations for the Safe Speed Program

Dear Mr. Leggett:

The Greater Olney Civic Association (GOCA) represents over 35 homeowner and civic associations in the Olney Master Plan area. For over 30 years, GOCA has promoted the civic, cultural, and economic welfare of the Olney community.

The subject of speed cameras has been of great debate in the Olney community for the past several years, with strong voices on all sides of the issue. Many Olney residents are thankful for the presence of speed cameras because they keep vehicle speed in Olney Town Center relatively low, creating a safer environment for pedestrians and also lowering the accident rate for motorists. Some Olney residents feel strongly that the speed enforcement program is generous because it allows motorists to exceed the speed limit by 11mph without receiving a citation. This contingent has adamantly expressed the viewpoint that motorists could drop the speed camera citation rate to zero by simply obeying the posted speeds. This faction makes the valid point that a motorist has to be travelling at least 42mph in a 30mph zone (i.e. 40% faster than the posted speed) to receive a citation. There is also a very vocal group that firmly believes Olney, relative to the rest of Montgomery County, is overrepresented, and perhaps unfairly represented, in terms of the number of speed cameras installed and the number of citations issued. In an effort to improve on the administration of the Safe Speed Program, GOCA recommends several measures, specified below, to address perceived transparency and governance issues of the program, including making basic data collected available to taxpayers. GOCA also recommends several adjustments to speed limits in specified areas.

In May 2014, because of the unending, heated, passionate debate about speed cameras in Olney, GOCA created a Traffic Camera Task Force to closely examine the Safe Speed Program, gather the facts, and guide GOCA to a responsible position on this matter. **The final report of this Task Force is enclosed with this letter for review by you and your staff.**

It is important to note that after studying the Safe Speed Program for the past 12 months, that Task Force concluded that the Montgomery County Police Department's Automated

Traffic Enforcement Unit (ATEU) “operates the County’s Safe Speed Program with personal commitment and integrity. The Safe Speed Program has not suffered from allegations of camera inaccuracy and other shortcomings associated with some other camera programs... The Safe Speed Program has shown that it decreases traffic speeds (as measured by numbers of citations) at camera locations over time.”

Thus, GOCA acknowledges the effectiveness of the Safe Speed Program and at the same time offers the following resolution, which was passed at our July 14 Executive Board meeting, in the spirit of making a good program even better:

*Whereas the geographic area within Montgomery County with the highest number of speed camera citations is Olney-Sandy Spring with 85,451 citations and \$3.4 million in fines in calendar year 2013, significantly higher than any other locale in the County; and*

*Whereas Olney had three of the top five grossing speed cameras in Montgomery County and five of the top twenty grossing cameras in calendar year 2013; and*

*Whereas in calendar year 2013 Olney-Sandy Spring received 31 percent more citations than the second highest ranking speed camera locale, Silver Spring, despite having 7.7 million or 30% fewer vehicle passes, and Olney-Sandy Spring citations were more than all ten Bethesda speed cameras combined, and were more than 2.7 times the number of tickets than Montgomery Village’s eleven speed cameras combined; and*

*Whereas Olney-Sandy Spring speed camera citations in CY 2013 were 5.7 times greater than the overall county average by geographic location and vehicles traveling in Olney-Sandy Spring were 3.4 times more likely to pass a speed monitoring camera than elsewhere in Montgomery County; and*

*Whereas accident rates in the Olney area, either before or after camera installation, do not explain the high number of Olney-Sandy Spring camera locations or citations;*

*Now therefore be it resolved that the Greater Olney Civic Association (GOCA) should formally transmit the Camera Task Force Report to the Montgomery County Executive, the County Council, the Montgomery County Police Department (MCPD) and ATEU, the Montgomery County Inspector General, appropriate District Delegates, and the State Highway Administration, asking that the County’s elected officials take action to eliminate the disproportionate impact of the camera program on the Olney-Sandy Spring area by implementing the following recommendations:*

- 1. Consistent with the Montgomery County Executive’s stated commitment to transparency, the ATEU should publish to its website on a monthly basis speed camera citations and vehicle pass volumes by camera location.*
- 2. Montgomery County should revise the Citizen’s Advisory Board for Traffic Issues (CAB-TI) applicable to the speed camera program, ensuring the Board is selected independently of the MCPD and ATEU, has established term limits, represents the full spectrum of views on the efficacy of speed camera usage, and that its views shall be considered by the ATEU.*
- 3. Montgomery County should appoint, fully independent of the MCPD, ATEU, and Local Designee, a Citizen’s Advocate to represent the citizens and communities regarding speed camera use, placement, and other concerns.*
- 4. Montgomery County should modify the speed camera contract to stipulate that all data captured on each citation shall be the property of the County, not the vendor, and that such data on citations, citation camera location, ticketed speed, etc. will be provided to the ATEU and published on the county website (protecting all Personally Identifiable Information (PII)).*

5. *The ATEU should be provided with the appropriate funding to implement the internal controls, data integrity, and transparency improvements included in the GOCA Traffic Cameras Task Force report. Such funding should come from the positive net revenue generated by the speed camera fines, consistent with the stated public safety purposes for which speed camera net revenues are authorized to be used. This net revenue funding should also be utilized to address the substantial backlog of citizen's requests for speed monitoring cameras.*
6. *The SHA should modify the speed limit east bound on Olney-Sandy Spring Road, beginning immediately after Spartan Road, to be 35 mph, providing for a safe incremental speed approaching the current 40 mph section of Olney-Sandy Spring Road east of Prince Philip Drive.*
7. *The SHA should modify the speed limit westbound on Olney-Sandy Spring Road, east of Prince Phillip Drive and immediately before Spartan Road, to be 35 mph, providing for a safe increment speed between the existing 40 mph roadway east of Prince Phillip Drive and the 30 mph area in the core Olney commercial center.*
8. *The Task Force Recommends that SHA return the 40 mph to 30 mph changeover point on Olney-Laytonsville Rd (Route 108, near the Post Office) to Homeland Drive for both east and westbound traffic. Moving the 40 mph point back to Homeland Drive returns the Olney-Laytonsville Road speed limit back to what it was in 2009, while maintaining the current 30 mph speed limit before the Olney Library and through the Olney core commercial center.*
9. *The SHA should modify the speed limit on Georgia Avenue between King William Drive and Sandy Spring Bank to be 35mph, providing for a safe incremental speed between the existing 40mph roadway south of King William Drive and the 30mph area in the core Olney commercial center.*

The first five resolved clauses in our resolution address perceived transparency and governance issues in the administration of the Safe Speed Program. In particular, the Task Force had serious concerns surrounding data transparency. For example, resolved clauses 6 thru 9 recommend creating speed limit transition zones premised on the theory that most of the citations are happening just above the statutory threshold (i.e. at 42mph to 47mph in a 30mph zone). By creating a brief 35mph zone as traffic is slowing from 40mph down to 30mph, theoretically many of these citations would no longer be issued. The Task Force sought to verify this statistically, but in spite of multiple requests for data correlating citation volume with vehicle speed, the Task Force was unable to obtain this data. **GOCA feels strongly that this is basic data reporting that should be readily available to taxpayers.**

The Task Force was also unable to obtain basic data breaking down the citations issued by vehicle owner zip code and time of day. Why is this data important? In GOCA's view, if the bulk of citations are being issued to pass-thru commuter traffic, then Olney residents can feel thankful that the speed cameras are effective at slowing high-speed commuters as they approach Town Center. On the other hand, if the citations are being issued to local Olney residents, then Olney as a community needs to look in the mirror at its own behavior and strive to become more safety-conscious.

In both cases, the Task Force was told that the data in question was "proprietary to" the camera vendor and would not be made available to the taxpayers for that reason. GOCA is perplexed that the County would enter into a contract with a vendor that gives the vendor ownership over critical data with no

requirements for making that data available to the taxpayers. **GOCA specifically requests that this contract be modified on a timely basis to address this material deficiency.**

GOCA is aware of a number of local residential corridors where homeowners are repeatedly complaining about speeding and requesting more enforcement. Notable examples of this circumstance include Queen Elizabeth between Georgia Avenue and 108, Old Baltimore Road between Gold Mine Road and 108, and Batchellors Forest Road between Dr. Bird Road and Georgia Avenue. The Task Force requested data on pending requests for enforcement so we could better understand the disposition of these requests. Again, the Task Force was stymied in its requests. We need to understand how much time elapses between a citizen request for enforcement and a response to that request. Is the backlog of citizen requests growing or shrinking? Does the ATEU have sufficient staff to perform speed studies and respond to citizen requests in a timely manner? Does the ATEU have sufficient equipment to provide enforcement in all cases where it is warranted? These are issues the Task Force should have been able to investigate, but could not because of lack of data.

GOCA again states its general support for and appreciation of the Safe Speed Program. As motorists, pedestrians, and cyclists, we all feel safer because of its existence. At the same time, we believe our Task Force has recommended some meaningful improvements to the program, and we ask that you give these recommendations fair consideration.

We look forward to your response on this matter.

Sincerely,

John Webster  
President, GOCA

Cc: District 14 and District 19 Delegations  
Montgomery County Council  
Douglas H. Simmons, Acting State Highway Administrator  
Capt. Thomas Didone, Director Traffic Division, MCPD  
J. Michael Zeigler, Executive Director, Maryland Police Training Commission

Attachment