



City of Rockville

## MEMORANDUM

November 9, 2007

TO: City of Rockville Planning Commission

FROM: Ann Wallas, Planner II, CPDS

THROUGH: Jim Wasilak, Chief of Planning

SUBJECT: **Third Public Hearing on Draft Twinbrook Neighborhood Plan  
November 14, 2007, 7:00 p.m.**

### **Background:**

A third Public Hearing is scheduled for Wednesday November 14, 2007 at 7:00 p.m. Testimony will be taken from the public. Rick Kleponis and Jeremy Kline of the architectural firm of Wheeler Goodman Masek (WGM) will be on hand to answer questions from the Commission as necessary.

The first Public Hearing on the Draft Plan was held on February 21, 2007 and the Planning Commission received a staff briefing, public testimony from twenty-four speakers, and legal counsel.

A second Public Hearing on the Draft Twinbrook Neighborhood Plan was held on Wednesday October 10, 2007. A short staff briefing was given, followed by a presentation by Messrs Kleponis and Kline of WGM, of a series of draft concepts that were assembled – per the Draft Plan recommendations - to illustrate what might be possible should the Veirs Mill Road Commercial area and the Lewis Avenue Industrial area redevelop. The presentation was followed by a short question and answer period and public testimony from twenty-one speakers. A transcript of the Public Hearing, together with a synopsis of the testimony, is attached.

### **Public Outreach:**

- The draft concepts for the commercial and industrial areas have been posted on the Twinbrook Neighborhood Plan website and an email, with the link, has been sent to all on the TNP listserv.

- A letter has been sent to all of the commercial and industrial property owners in the Veirs Mill commercial and Lewis Avenue industrial areas. The letter gives the TNP website link, the Zoning Ordinance link, information about the November 14 Public Hearing and includes a letter-size copy of the relevant presentation board. Property owners are invited to call or email if they have questions.
- An illustrated article appeared in the November edition of Rockville Reports.
- Public Hearing notices appeared in English in The Gazette, Rockville edition, and in Spanish in El Tiempo Latino and the Washington Hispanic.
- A postcard, in English and Spanish, has been mailed to every address in the two planning areas.
- Staff attended a meeting at the Twinbrook Library on Wednesday, November 7, 2007, which was attended by approximately thirty residents of the area together with owners and representatives from the two shopping centers on Veirs Mill Road. Staff gave short presentations on the Draft TNP, and the Zoning Ordinance re-write, and took questions from the floor.

#### **Next Steps:**

- Two Worksessions are scheduled:
  - November 28, 2007  

Messrs Kleponis and Kline will give a short presentation on the draft concepts for the commercial and industrial areas. They will answer questions and receive feedback from the Commission.
  - December 12, 2007  

Worksession on Draft Plan elements.
- Establish date for Closure of the Public Record:  

The Planning Commission should give consideration to an appropriate date on which to close the Public Record. Staff suggests closing the public record on January 16, 2008, which should allow time for testimony to be prepared after the public hearings and worksessions. The Commission should then schedule additional Worksessions in the New Year to consider what modifications they wish to make to the Draft Plan prior to recommending it to the Mayor and Council.

Attachments: October 10, 2007 Public Hearing Transcript  
Synopsis of October 10, 2007 Public Hearing testimony.

**TWINBROOK NEIGHBORHOOD PLAN**  
**Summary of Verbal Comments Received at Public Hearing**  
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| Linda Bozzonetti<br>Neighborhood Plan<br>Advisory Group<br>(TNPAG). | <p>Speaking on behalf of Joe McClane, TNPAG Chair, who is out of the country. Submit this testimony in support of the draft TNP as submitted by the TNPAG. The City and TNPAG worked together to ensure that the entire Twinbrook community was part of the process in developing the TNP. Outreach was one of the most extensive and expensive efforts undertaken. It was an inclusive and transparent process: we hope our efforts will broaden community activism.</p> <p>The Maryland Department of Planning supports the Draft Plan. The Twinbrook community embraced the plan's focus on retaining single-family homes, improving public facilities. The TNP represents the only concrete action to address Twinbrook's future planning needs.</p> <p>From the few residents who do not like a part of the TNP, we can find no agreement on an alternative to the plan we have represented.</p> <p>A comment of my own – to remind everyone the drawings we've seen tonight are a concept – an idea of what could happen in the future. We have no control over what the current property owner chooses to do with their properties.</p> |
| Karl Hargar   | <p>A lot of people in Twinbrook don't have time to participate and are generally indifferent as things change, although there is always some resistance to change and some people feel powerless.</p> <p>There's this idea that we have to accommodate cars forever. We're not going to be able to drive the way we have previously. There are concerns about the sizes of houses in Twinbrook. Some of the business owners are concerned that they won't be able to afford to stay.</p> <p>I want to focus on less cars, less auto traffic.</p>   |
| William Neil, Land<br>Use Chair, TCA                                | <p>Since my earlier comments to the PC in the essay Mixed Use Mania we have been able to evaluate the effects of the downturn in national and local real estate markets. There are many homes for sale, for rent and empty in Twinbrook at the same time we're conducting an experiment in smart growth with the Town Center and Twinbrook Station. It will probably take five years to sort out whether there is a problem with the product or the terrible timing that's affecting sales. I've had no feedback on my long essay.</p> <p>The retail component needs true urban densities but we'd be stuck in traffic because we don't have the transit infrastructure to support urban density. We should leave the commercial areas as they are and revisit them in five years when we have a better sense of the actual level of demand for new projects.</p>  |
| Alison Moser  | <p>Gratified to see the architects' presentation because once they started doing the planning they saw that the density was too high for Twinbrook Shopping Center. I think 65 feet is too high, too many people. The schools are crowded.</p> <p>I think the Atlantic Avenue cut-through would be really great – it would</p>   |

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|  | <p>help access and would slow the cars surfing through the parking lot. The plan should not support the current uses at the Broome site: there's a methadone clinic next to Meadow Hall Elementary School. The Director there has said that he'd prefer to be Metro accessible. The site is not well kept up.</p> <p>I'm waiting for a meeting on traffic calming on Twinbrook Parkway. It's very difficult to cross. I love the speed cameras, they've slowed traffic down, but there are still a lot of cars.</p>  |
| <p>Lora Meisner,<br/> President Burgundy<br/> Estates Citizens<br/> Association.<br/> TNPAG member</p> | <p>I thought the presentation looked like a third town center. There are 65 development projects proposed in the City. Including pending projects there are 85. I think there is too much development going on in Rockville and I doubt the high density suggested in this plan is sustainable because of the amount of development that precedes it.</p> <p>Many people in the Atlantic Avenue area do not want a cut-through because the traffic is already bad. We need to get more community input from the people directly affected.</p> <p>Concerned about conflict of interest.</p> <p>Moving to Oregon in the near future because of concerns about the quality of life here. The cost of living keeps increasing while infrastructure continues to lag, especially the Metro Red Line. I hope the voters send a message in the election to bring some sanity to the planning and development process.</p> |
| <p>Sherry Lane</p>   | <p>I live on Atlantic Avenue and agree with a lot of what has been said, although not all of it. I think that something has to happen in Twinbrook – to say we shouldn't change anything is not a good idea. The shopping centers are both in decay. Problems with crime, litter, drunkenness. Development might improve those issues. But lack of [residential] sales in Town Center might mean problems with sales here.</p> <p>Traffic and pedestrian safety a huge issue too. Don't see anything here to make it safer for walking. Great to see open green space in that new area, but need to improve current green space: people don't feel the bike path is safe. I think these issues need to be addressed.</p>   |
| <p>Mary Ann Barnes</p>   | <p>I've lived here 42 years and seen a lot of changes. This Twinbrook Plan and printed brochure seems to focus on the excessive commercial development at the expense of neighborhood character. Who's going to pay for all of this? I realize that both Twinbrook Shopping Centers are in sad condition – there are dirty windows. I'm not buying food from a store with dirty windows. The sidewalks in both centers are full of gum wads and on the north side are dangerous. It slopes.</p>  |
| <p>Robert Taylor</p>   | <p>No comment at this time.</p>  |
| <p>Tracy Pakulniewicz<br/> Chidiac, Cambridge<br/> Walk I HOA Pres.</p>                                | <p>I'm here to talk on behalf of myself. I support this plan. It's not a perfect plan but it's flexible. And the system has been set up so that people with concerns about the Plan can come out and express their concerns.</p>   |

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|  | <p>I applaud the efforts of the residents who worked on this plan for over two years. The Plan represents the voice of the people – I don't think that should be taken and forgotten about. There was a tremendous amount of outreach. One source that was used was the Twinbrook Voice that reached all residents. Unfortunately the Voice is no longer circulated.</p> <p>At the last Public Hearing I was impressed that the Planning Commissioners provided an opportunity for an association to provide a supplemental document recommending changes to the Plan. I'm disappointed the association didn't do that. I don't understand how changes can be made to the plan when those changes are not brought forward. You'll be hearing a lot from members of TCA. I'd like to remind Commissioners that TCA is a membership organization and does not represent the entire voices of Twinbrook.</p>   |
| <p>Paula Squire<br/>Waterman, TNPAG<br/>member</p>           | <p>I've lived here twelve years and I've seen changes. I live on Greunther and would be affected by Atlantic Avenue cut-through traffic.</p> <p>We worked very hard in the TNPAG group and we had to accommodate each other. There were strong opinions on the committee. We worked pretty hard to write the Plan. But we tried to keep it flexible and we always said that we would accommodate different opinions and asked them to put in a nicely written piece to be added in. It's very important to remember that we still have that option: we'd be happy to have disagreeing opinions, but they do need to be written.</p>   |
| <p>Judy Miller, Vice<br/>President TCA,<br/>TNPAG member</p> | <p>This is the nicely written response that we're going to provide to the Planning Commission. I believe in government. I believe in the process but I have doubts about the process now and about conflicts of interest. I have concerns when something is brought forward that we have never seen before. These are two Public Hearings and these are the only two times we have to make comments on it. We brought people into the process – maybe 130 people – we all worked very hard, including city staff. But citizens don't have time to keep coming back. We thought we were going to have design workshops to talk about these things but then the process was aborted basically.</p> <p>We very firmly felt that 35 feet was probably right at Twinbrook Shopping Center and Mart, and that this was a reasonable level, because we didn't have all the information we needed. We came with some general considerations: commercial on the bottom, perhaps professional offices on the top, trying to improve it, get a professional look to the place. We would want to keep our local businesses and allow them to prosper.</p> <p>On Lewis Avenue we'd prefer townhouses. They'd provide a nice environment. There's a real need for families to have places to live. Studios, one and two bedrooms are not helping families. The condo fees are exorbitant, even with MPDUs. Affordable housing doesn't really work with condos. If we have enough townhouses they'll be MPDUs too.</p> |

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|                                     | <p>We want a community center on the Taylor property. We've got security concerns there. I'm worried about green space there, we'd like a community center. We've not been given one by the developers [of Twinbrook Station] and we're going to need it with all the people coming in.</p> <p>We'd like to take out the conservation districts.</p>  |
| Harry Thomas                        | <p>Former President of TCA. As President of TCA I put forward names for the TNPAG. I don't like the height [of Twinbrook Station] I said no to the 13 and 16 stories at the town center and Twinbrook Commons [Station]. This is a Plan that needs to go forth. We need to have some type of a tool to go to the landlords and property owners. The buildings are in desperate need of repair, of being revitalized. This is a tool for that.</p> <p>You should not have brought in [the visual presentation] tonight. Bring it in at a later date. Not that it's not a right program. I don't like height but the Town Center is a success. This is too big, but we do need a tool to go the landowners with.</p>  |
| Christina Ginsburg,<br>Chair of TCA | <p>I regret not supporting Harry [Thomas] in his efforts to get heights lowered at Twinbrook Commons [Station]. I thought it was a done deal. This is not a done deal. The process has been completely disappointing. Last time I was here I wanted to talk in specifics and you did not want to listen to us. Let's talk in generalities. Three times we have come up and spun straw into gold for you and the staff has completely ignored our recommendations. The presentations made do not reflect what went on in these three meetings. We thought we had a binding agreement to continue; it was abated unilaterally.</p> <p>We've heard the numbers about what this process cost. I was told \$26,000. That is pitifully money. The Stone Street Implementation Task Force spent \$285,000 on one consultant. I'd like to know what was spent on this process. I would be surprised if it approached anything at the level of the Stonestreet process.</p> <p>The paper I've handed you is a short response. We said in January that we wanted to see what RORZOR came up with. Because I was a member of RORZOR I knew what was coming. That document came out Monday. The Executive Committee of TCA prepared this and Judy [Miller] has hit on some of the points.</p> <p>Twinbrook does not want to loosen floating zones on the rest of the City. RORZOR didn't support that.</p> <p>We want neighborhood conservation districts taken out. We don't support giving that decision to the Mayor and Council, which is what RORZOR has right now. If individual areas want to do this, that is their prerogative.</p> <p>There is one paragraph about the Veirs Mill Road area: that section is fully detailed and we reserve the right to address the other sections. We are going to tie this to RORZOR.</p> |

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|                                       | <p>We don't support taking Glenview Mansion property for storm water runoff that comes from town center.</p> <p>We don't support the bus route or transit line. We don't support the transit center.</p> <p>We're still continuing the dialogue but the way this process has been conducted is shameful.</p>   |
| Kevin Gallagher                       | <p>This document should be tabled and it shouldn't be acted upon until RORZOR is voted and agreed upon and implemented.</p> <p>Floating zones that are lay over zones are undefined in the document. The historic preservation language is less than democratic. I believe any community that wants to be part of a historic preservation should be a least a majority of two thirds. And the process here has reflected Mayor Giammo's comments regarding the satisfaction survey. It's shameful. The process is flawed. There are conflicts.</p>   |
| Steve Wilcox,<br>Secretary, TCA       | <p>A plan like this can do a lot of damage. The [TCA] Executive Committee met and compiled a bunch of things that they see as wrong with the plan, and you've heard some of them, and you're going to hear more. What I've read in the Gazette about the process, statements by Steve Johnson, the Mayor, and evidence of shamefulfulness. I'm concerned about what poor process will do for Twinbrook.</p>  |
| Carl Henn                             | <p>The architects who brought these drawings to us have helped me visualize the plan better. I think it helped the process for everyone to see this. So I don't think it was dirty politics for them to bring these here tonight, although it would have been nice to have them shared with the community ahead of time. The visualization concept drawing process came up with lower density by a substantial margin: 1.25 FAR instead of 2.0. Given the strong concerns about density I think that's the direction to go so that something overpowering like that brought forth in these drawings can't happen.</p> <p>I'd like to focus on something no one has mentioned and that's park area. The Plan envisions that we need more park area, green space in Twinbrook. In particular that's true of the southern part of Twinbrook.</p> <p>The only way to do this is to buy some houses. The plan recognizes that we ought to have funding and I'd like to make the conceptual link between that and money coming from the redevelopment of these mixed use centers. That would be the time to capture some money for additional pocket parks etc. If we had money available we could buy burnt out homes: it would only cost us the price of the lot, would remove an eyesore and would give us pocket parks where we need them.</p> <p>I'd also like to see community gardens made available for the people of Twinbrook.</p> |
| Denise Fredericks,<br>Member of TNPAG | <p>I've lived here fourteen years with my husband and our four kids and our dog. I went to the first meeting at Meadow Hall and am a member of the</p>   |

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|  | <p>TNPAG. I thought it might help for you and others to see who was part of the group that created this document that is in such contention. We're mothers and fathers, grandmas, granddads, new owners and some original owners. We spent two years collaboratively and sometimes combatively discussing what we wanted as a community.</p> <p>I am proud that one of the ground rules from our first meeting was that if a strong minority opinion was held we wanted to make sure that it was noted. We weren't going to bulldoze anyone's opinion.</p> <p>The things foremost in our minds were traffic, pedestrian safety, the needs of seniors and children. There's no senior center on our side. It's not a good idea for middle school students to just be roaming the streets or sitting home alone.</p> <p>The plan may not be perfect or permanent but it's a good plan. I would like to urge the Commission to approve it. I'd like to thank City staff for their patience and their time in answering all of our questions. We are people in the community: I do non-profit fund raising, I don't have anything to do with planning or development, so this is not something that I come to professionally. I don't have a dog in this fight except that I care about what happens here: I care about my kids safety, crossing roads and going to the shopping centers.</p> <p>Thank you for listening as we make comments. I hope you can find a way to approve the plan.</p> |
| <p>Todd Harrison,<br/> Chair, Traffic and<br/> Transportation, TCA</p> | <p>I've submitted comments and spoken about the plan before. I talked a lot about affordable housing. The plan notes that 60% of students at Twinbrook ES are on free, or reduced priced lunch. Yet the plan doesn't say anything about what we can do to help. I think that's shameful. Extra programs for kids after school is a start. Affordable housing is a start. I'm not a zoning expert but it seems like there's going to be something we can do when you zone new areas. Maybe we can have a trade off deal before we raise the limits and let them build condos up to 65 feet: where you build another floor higher you have to increase the percentage of MPDUs. There are trade offs like that for environmental considerations too. I'm not speaking for TCA here, but for myself and I support affordable housing. Housing has become unaffordable. More affordable housing would be good for the neighborhood.</p> <p>But I've seen a lot of talk about approving the plan as it is. I really looked at the traffic and transportation part of the plan the most. I think the pedestrian safety measures that are outlined are great. We should keep them.</p> <p>The plan doesn't take a position on the Bus Rapid Transit and I think it should because the neighborhood doesn't want it.</p> <p>The Plan talks about a circulator trolley: it's an outdated idea now that the Council decided not to fund the trolley. The plan needs to be updated. It</p>              |

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|   | <p>references Twinbrook Commons: it's now called Twinbrook Station. I know these are minor things but it's silly to say that you should approve the plan as it is. You need to update it. The traffic light at Veirs Mill and Broadwood has been installed.</p> <p>My biggest concern is that the plan doesn't talk about traffic impact from adding all of these condos. I don't know whether mixed use is a good idea. The first floor of town center is a success. Above 20 feet it's not a success. I don't know if we want to push this mixed used idea into our neighborhood, especially considering the traffic impact.</p>   |
| <p>Naomi Belkin,<br/> President Twinbrook<br/> Park Condo Assn.<br/> (Twinbrook Mart)</p> | <p>I've been in business here for about twenty-two years. And I've been to two of these things and I was prepared to be bored. But it was not boring. I still can't figure out what's going on because there's so much adversarial comment going that it is really disturbing. We're supposed to be trusting that there is some sort of civic process going on. You guys have problems because the community is not with you.</p> <p>I basically am a businessperson and I represent the business people here. And we're pretty simple compared to what the community wants.</p> <p>I agree that the center has always looked lousy, but when the [previous manager] sold I took over and have poured every single dollar I could into that shopping center trying to get it to look better.</p> <p>And we're continuing that process, but I can't change twenty years of bad management overnight. But since I've been involved in this process I have been let down. I expected a certain level of community involvement and didn't see it. There were going to be workshops. I didn't see any workshops. There was no consultation with me or anybody else at the shopping centers as far as I know. Ann called me to come here tonight; otherwise I guess I wouldn't have come. I am prepared to accept the result, but I think you should probably try and get a smoother relationship.</p> |
| <p>Jacquie Kubin</p>  | <p>I'm jumping into this. I'm a member of TCA, though not an active member. I have a real life that keeps me from these things. I applaud the work that any group can do to create a 129-page document. I'm a writer; I know how difficult it is. I've lived here 20 years and I've seen changes. I'm not against progress. We need to decide as a group, are we a city or are we a suburb? I think this is something that needs to be addressed and I don't see it in this plan. I don't understand the goal of the plan because you can't tell me what we're going to do in twenty years.</p> <p>I don't want another stick built project in Rockville that has that red brick façade and yellow façade. It's ugly. I've heard we have 65 building projects and I'm worried about that. We need to say this is a great effort, and then we need to look at Twinbrook and decide what's broken. Let's spend money on outreach to the shopping center owners and fix those areas. We need better infrastructure: pipes are seeping in our streets, sidewalks are broken, we have horrible light pollution.</p>   |

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|                   | <p>Let's make the community more beautiful and look at the next five, six years and tomorrow, because twenty years might not come.</p>  |
| Brigitta Mulligan | <p>I've lived in Twinbrook for forty-two years. I don't want conservation districts. The issues are traffic, safety.</p> <p>The plan has two percent commercial and ninety eight percent residential. And I think we need to talk more about the residential. I liked one of the things Todd [Harrison] said about having flexibility where you can ask for more open or green space. It just reminds me of the optional method, which works and which is something the city is trying to get rid of. That's where you can negotiate and get more for the community.</p> <p>There's talk about the condos in town center. The Rio took ten years to sell and now it's booming.</p> <p>I want to calm things down.</p> <p>Things are a little different from East Rockville where the business community had a concern. I'm missing the commercial elements, but I don't think they have a problem with this plan because I think that the City has reached out to them. Because if they had a problem they'd come out like the rezoning issue in East Rockville.</p> <p>I was shocked to see the [visuals] tonight and it would maybe have helped if people could see what they were allowed to build and compared it to this, they would have had a different concept. That's an issue. What can the commercial areas be in twenty years? By the way, twenty-five years ago everybody was upset because the Metro was coming to Twinbrook: they had all kinds of negative things to say. I think it was a great thing for the community.</p> |