

## Walker-Bey, James T.

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**From:** Jamie Hitaffer <jamie.hitaffer@gmail.com>  
**Sent:** Tuesday, January 9, 2024 12:01 AM  
**To:** Clerk of the Council  
**Subject:** DSP-2002: Testimony of Opposition

**Follow Up Flag:** Follow up  
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Dear Office of the Clerk of the Council,

I am contacting you for myself and on behalf of all the great neighbors of the South Laurel community. I would like to voice our concerns and state my opposition to the approval of DSP-20002 (Giac Son Buddhist Temple proposal). My name is James Hitaffer. I am a resident and neighbor living in a quiet rural neighborhood located off Snowden Road in South Laurel (Prince Georges County). Additionally, I am a member of the South Laurel Civic Association (SLCA). I was born and raised in Laurel. As was my father and grandfather.

Over the past 45 years I have learned to adapt and welcome the changes and vast growth of the city of Laurel as well as my neighborhood. I understand that change, although challenging, is necessary for the growth and evolution of our city, both socially and economically. However, as the County enriches itself with its expansion commercially and residentially, I believe the older communities and residents are being overlooked. Unfortunately, there are many good people, families, friends, and neighbors who will be victimized if DSP-20002 is approved. My feelings of defeat, disgust and exhaustion from dealing with departments and agencies (of PG County) that seem to disregard or overlook such an obvious scam has led me to contact you.

I live in a residential community. It is zoned as Rural Residential. I am surrounded by a community of single-family homes. In December 2014, my neighbors house was bought by a "single mother" looking for a home. However, less than 2 years later, she gave her home and property to a group of Buddhists. Since 2015, the transformation of the once single-family home into a Buddhist temple (Giac Son Buddhist Temple) has been swift and steady. Now, the residents of my community are facing the seemingly imminent transformation of this once single-family, residentially zoned property into a commercial property to be used for their newly developed Buddhist Temple.

This did not seem fair or legal. However, the more I researched for answers and reached out to our County for help, the more I found that this situation was occurring in other parts of the county and other communities were suffering from the lack of support and attention from the county agencies. Over the past 8 years or so, my neighbors and I have been

voicing our concerns to law enforcement and other agencies of PG County regarding the various illegal actions, unpermitted deforestation/grading of land, excessive noise pollution, illegal parking, improper stormwater management, as well as the operation of an unlicensed food-service operation.

We have attempted to bring attention to this developing situation and unlawful acts committed by the new property owners, however, it seems our voices have not been heard. Our community has been opposing the expansion of the commercial business (Giac Son Buddhist Temple) in a residentially zoned property. The Prince Georges County Council met to discuss the proposed Detailed Site Plans (DSP-20002). The DSP-20002 is now in the appeal process and is scheduled to go before the District Council 16 January 2024.

The South Laurel Civic Association has brought up many valid points as to why DSP-20002 should be declined, including: failed permits, incorrect land surveys, illegal deforestation, improper stormwater control, and running an unlicensed business (restaurant) on the premises. We are hoping the District Council is able to see that the actions are blatant and completely disregard the laws and ordinances set by the county.

Deforestation and Grading of the land: They have deforested their property and neighboring properties. They excavated trees, bushes and grass in order to grade their land, while destroying the neighboring properties. They have done this without proper permits from the county and with a blatant disregard for their neighbors, the land, and the laws that protect it. They have illegally graded, paved and graveled the property to provide for parking, landscaping, placement of excessively large statue (15-20 ft tall), and to prepare for their proposed Temple.

The removal of these naturally existing water barriers and controls has allowed even minor rainfall to flow from Rt.197 directly to the rest of the neighboring properties. As a direct result, myself and the neighbors have dealt with endless flooding and stormwater damage to our properties, both inside and outside. Our yards are now washing away. Often flooded and swampy. The excess water and excessive saturation of the soils has killed grass and rotted roots and trees. We have called the police and other county agencies, only to be ignored, mislead, or re-directed to another agency.

This has become a tiresome and exhaustive process that has left me and the other neighbors feeling helpless and defeated.

Traffic and Parking Dangers: The temple events can attract hundreds of parishioners on weekends resulting in overwhelming traffic and illegal parking (including buses) on the neighborhood streets. The intersection of Rt.197, Snowden Road, and South Laurel Drive has become a common intersection for traffic accidents. This has become further exacerbated by the large numbers of cars attending the Temple events as the current residence/home turned Temple has very limited parking available.

Law enforcement and 311 have been called on many occasions to no avail. Illegal parking regularly takes place along areas of Snowden Road and Pheasant Run. The road is not wide enough to allow for parking on both sides of the street

and this level of traffic and parking significantly restricts, if not prevents, two-way traffic. This is a major concern as it will also limit or prevent emergency vehicle access to the road. This is a very threatening concern as my son has a health condition and suffers from seizures. We have already had to have emergency response requiring an ambulance transport for our son. My greatest fear is that they may not be able to navigate our street if needed.

Noise ordinance: Most (if not all) of their events are held on weekends. These events always include excessively loud music. Starting early in the morning and lasting until the evening hours past 10pm, the music, chanting and singing can be heard over a block away. It has been measured as high as 92 decibels from my property which is hundreds of feet away. We have called law enforcement, 311, and placed reports online to no avail.

Even the PG County Police Department is now working secondary at their events, ignoring our requests to have them abide by the regulations for noise. This is very stressful for me and my family as my son has a seizure condition and has had interruptions to his much needed rest due to the excessively loud music. Disruptions to his sleep, insufficient rest, and excessive stress could trigger a seizure.

In addition to the deforestation, traffic, and noise, we are also contending with the unlicensed operation of a food service. During each event, the residents of the home/temple transform their shed into a make-shift kitchen. There is much concern over food safety and sanitation. However, we have additional concerns over the waste management. The service of food for such masses creates much waste. This waste has been seen being dumped into the yard of a neighboring property. This threatens the health of any naturally existing animals in the area as well as increases the risk of rodent infestation.

Additionally, the trash produced by such large events greatly exceeds the amount of trash produced by a single-family residence. However, they utilize the county waste management resources just the same as any other residence. I believe a commercial business should be required to invest in the proper waste management services and not be able to utilize residential services.

I am not writing to you to complain. I am writing to attempt to bring awareness to a quickly escalating issue in our community and PG county. Hopefully, I am able to draw your attention and concern to an urgent matter that has been troubling our neighborhood and will soon affect a whole community and PG County.

Sincerely,

James Hitaffer

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