

March 25, 2025



Donna Brown
Clerk of the Prince George's County Council
1301 McCormick Drive
Largo, Maryland 20774

Subject: Request to Disapprove or Remand Detailed Site Plan 22001 – McDonald's on Ager Road

Dear Ms. Brown,

For the reasons below and others, we, the undersigned Persons of Record, respectfully urge the District Council to disapprove Detailed Site Plan 22001 (DSP-22001) – McDonald's on Ager Road. In alternative, we urge the District Council to remand the case to the Planning Board for a *de novo* review with a directive to examine more fully this project's potential impacts on the environment, public safety (particularly road safety for the most vulnerable users: cyclists and pedestrians), traffic congestion, public health, historical preservation, and climate change, and to examine more fully whether this project is consistent with the purposes and goals of the Zoning Ordinance, relevant functional master plans, the County's Climate Action Plan, and other relevant policy documents.

The Applicant, McDonald's, proposes to build a high-volume drive-through fast-food outlet along Maryland 410 (East-West Highway) in the Green Meadows Shopping Center. Even though the Planning Board convened three substantive hearing on DSP-22001, we believe that throughout that process the Planning Board and Planning Department did not adequately consider this project's potential impacts on the environment, public safety (particularly road safety for the most vulnerable users: cyclists and pedestrians), traffic congestion, public health, historical preservation, or climate change.

Critically, because McDonald's has not been required to secure approval of a Conceptual Site Plan or a Preliminary Plan of Subdivision, this DSP is the **only** opportunity for the public to comment on this project's impacts on the community, the environment, and public health, and for the Planning Board and the District Council to understand and fairly weigh those impacts.

We are deeply concerned that McDonald's has asserted that the Planning Board is not required or even allowed to consider off-site impacts or existing and projected off-site conditions, including conditions that clearly affect traffic safety and public health. For many reasons, we believe that this assertion is incorrect and that failing to consider off-site conditions or to assess off-site impacts ignores basic planning principles, will lead to a poorly informed decision, and will undermine the public interest. It also ignores the conclusions of other county entities and efforts on the vulnerability of this precise location to additional traffic congestion and a lack of healthy dietary option.

We are pleased that the Planning Board hearings led McDonald's to withdraw its request for approval of a significant Departure from Design Standards (DDS-23001). Approval of DDS-

23001 would have allowed McDonald's to destroy, needlessly, most or all of the trees and tree canopy on the site, allegedly to address issues related to the presence of unhoused people on the property; however, as we have pointed out and as Planning Staff has acknowledged, removing that woodland would not solve that trespassing issue. It would, however, have harmed an already overburdened community by worsening the existing urban heat island, increased stormwater runoff, wiped out wildlife habitat, destroyed trees that help fight climate change by absorbing carbon dioxide, and destroyed natural beauty in a heavily urbanized area.

McDonald's late-December withdrawal of DDS-23001 helps to avoid or reduce those impacts, enhances the possibility of preserving at least some tree canopy on the property, and enhances the possibility of maintaining the required that the County's *Landscape Manual* requires for incompatible uses adjoining historic sites.

Despite that small but important step in the right direction, numerous concerns about the project's impacts remain unaddressed. Here is an outline of a few of those impacts and related issues.

Worsening Traffic and Safety Problems at a Congested Intersection and on Unsafe Roads

McDonald's proposes to build this high-volume drive-through right next to a complex five-point intersection, and along a road segment that is among the most dangerous in the county with respect to fatal and injury crash rates. Adding a high-volume drive-through will exacerbate these issues, and will imperil pedestrians and bicyclists the most. It also will increase local emissions and ambient air concentrations of traffic-related air pollution in an already overburdened community.

Site observations and publicly available crash data indicate that local roads abutting or very near the site, particularly segments near the intersections of East-West Highway with Riggs Road and Ager Road, have a disproportionate number of crashes and are prone to traffic jams that compromise level of service and increase crash risk. The site is within the watershed of two elementary schools, next to three bus stops that serve high-volume routes and surrounded by dense residential areas, making the site a high-pedestrian location and desirable bike commuting route.

Incredibly, the Applicant and the Planning Board have asserted that off-site impacts and conditions may not be considered in this DSP review even though Section 27-102 of the Zoning Ordinance states that the purposes of the Ordinance include "*To protect and promote the health, safety, morals, comfort, convenience, and welfare of the present and future inhabitants of the County*" and "*to lessen the danger and congestion of traffic on the streets, and to insure the continued usefulness of all elements of the transportation system for their planned functions.*"

The Applicant has provided no evidence that this project would meet these or numerous other purposes of the Ordinance. Please see detailed testimony on traffic, road safety issues, and added vehicle load that will exacerbate these issues [here](#), and photos and videos [here](#).

Impacts on the Environment, Public Health, and Environmental Justice

We believe that the Planning Board has erred in refusing, generally, to consider off-site impacts and significant aspects of the site's context. We also believe that the Planning Board has erred by failing to consider the potential public health impacts of this project, especially when:

- Section 27-284 of the Zoning Ordinance *requires* a DSP to be referred to the Health Department and charges the Department with assessing the distribution of a project's health impacts *in the community*; and
- Those impacts fall upon a community that already is subject to multiple social, environmental, and economic stressors, so many that it appears to be an Environmental Justice Community, based on screening tools offered by the US EPA, MDE, and the University of Maryland School of Public Health.

The community near this site:

- Has a very high concentration of people of color and higher-than-average percentages of children under five years of age, residents who do not speak English, who lack health insurance, etc.
- Exists in Food Swamp, with an overabundance of unhealthy food options and a lack of healthy food options;
- Already suffers serious traffic congestion, high accident rates, high accident-related injuries, and pedestrian fatalities;
- Exists in an Intense Urban Heat Island due to an overabundance of pavement and buildings, and a serious lack of tree canopy, forests; and
- According to the US EPA and University of Maryland School of Public Health has multiple characteristics that typify an Environmental Justice community;
- Is over-burdened with heavy traffic and elevated levels of ozone, diesel particulates, nitrogen dioxide, and probably other toxic and carcinogenic traffic-related air pollutants.

Any one of these stressors merits consideration, and the cumulative impacts of so many stressors certainly should weigh heavily against approving this project. Yet none of these factors' impacts have been seriously considered, if at all, by the Planning Department or the Planning Board. The Health Department's January 30, 2024, letter to M-NCPPC mentions "a desktop health impact assessment review" but fails to identify, much less examine, any of these significant risk factors and fails to explore the project's potential impacts on the community.

Notably, the damaging impacts of fast-food drive-throughs are significant enough that, for a variety of reasons, jurisdictions are banning new drive-throughs. Those jurisdictions include the City of Minneapolis, towns in California, Missouri and New Jersey, and probably most recently, the City of Annapolis, which in December 2024 passed an ordinance prohibiting drive-through windows for new fast-food restaurants.

Undermining Food Equity and Deepening the Local Food Swamp

The County has passed measures to incentivize healthy food options, supported the creation of a county-wide Food Equity Council and has designated Healthy Food Priority Areas (HFPAs). This

property lies within an HFPA. We applaud these County efforts and respectfully request that the District Council advocate for their consideration, as the Planning Board has not considered such policies in reviewing this case. Ensuring a proposed development aligns with the HFPA designation would ensure alignment with the Purposes of the Zoning Ordinance, specifically Sec. 27-102, “Protect and promote the health, safety, morals, comfort, convenience, and welfare of the present and future inhabitants of the County.”

There already are 15 McDonald’s within a 10-mile radius, and others are proposed nearby. This new McDonald’s drive-through would be within what Prince George’s Healthcare Action Coalition (PGHAC), the Health Department, and Prince George’s County Food Equity Council call a “Food Swamp,” meaning the community has too few healthy food options and too many unhealthy ones.

Notably, a significant body of research shows that people of color suffer from higher rates of Type 2 diabetes, obesity, and other conditions due to poor diets, lack of exercise, and other factors. Some studies have found a correlation between the proximity of fast-food outlets and obesity in nearby communities. At least one study found this impact to be greatest among African American women.

Historical Preservation of a Site with Documented Significance Regarding Enslaved People

This property was once part of the Green Hill Plantation, which was one of the largest plantations in the region, which once was known as Chillum Castle Manor. The Green Hill Plantation now functions as a Roman Catholic seminary owned by the Pallottine Fathers. The enslavement of many Black men, women, and children on that plantation has been well-documented, and it is highly probable that graves of those enslaved people lie, or once did lie, on the project site and/or the adjacent seminary’s grounds.

Thanks to evidence presented by members of our group and to robust discussion during the Planning Board’s fall hearings, M-NCPPC has taken a closer look at these essential facts, and McDonald’s presumably will continue to consult with reputable historic preservation specialists during the development process. Even so, we urge additional due diligence regarding the history of this land.

Last fall, we presented evidence that at least 39 persons – including 33 whose names are known – had been enslaved here by the Digges and Riggs families. Both families benefited mightily and continue to hold wealth earned upon the theft of labor from those they enslaved for generations.

While McDonald’s now plans to include “posters” in the restaurant about this history, we are deeply concerned that this concession fails to reflect the *gravitas* of what occurred on this land. If the past is prologue, a transparent curation process, with observation and meaningful commentary by the community and county elected officials, will be essential to rich and rigorous curation of this property.

Even though the Green Hill Seminary site is recognized as a county historic resource, the complex and troubling history of that land generally is woefully underacknowledged. We fear that private control – by the Pallottine Fathers seminary and now McDonald’s partners – may

mean that this information will continue to be insufficiently public. Transparent and honest curation of this county historic resource is essential to preventing that outcome.

Local Economics: Low-Paying Jobs Subsidized by Taxpayers

The proposed drive through would be counter to the Purposes of the Zoning Ordinance, specifically Sec. 27-102: “Encourage economic development activities that provide desirable employment and a broad, protected tax base.” While McDonald’s estimates that this drive-through would create 50 jobs, please note that a federal General Accounting Office report (October 2020, GAO-21-45) found that, other than from Walmart, no company has more employees enrolled in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and in Medicaid than McDonald’s. In other words, many of these new jobs will likely be heavily subsidized by taxpayers. Food service work is, generally, low paid. However, local business – in contrast to McDonald’s economic activity – often reflects dollars, risks, investments that perform as local economic multipliers. Work conditions can also be better in small business local contexts. For example, fast-foot employers often use “just-in-time” scheduling, which can be difficult for workers to manage in terms of child care, commuting, and other aspects of daily life.

We hope that this summary provides a clear outline of some of the impacts this project may have on the local community, public health, public safety, transportation, and the environment. We hope, too, that it demonstrates why it is critical to consider those in a Council-convened hearing. We would be happy to share additional information and to answer any questions that we can, and we hope to talk soon with you about these issues.

As always, thank you for your time and your consideration, and for your service to the community.

Sincerely,



Greg Smith
4204 Farragut Street
Hyattsville, MD 20781
gpsmith@igc.org
(240) 605-9238

Jeff Cronin
7217 15th Avenue
Takoma Park, MD 20912
jeff@jeffcronin.com
(202) 421-8911

Lisa Entzminger
7213 16th Avenue
Takoma Park, MD 20912
Lisa@carolehighlands.org
(513) 535-1214

Alexi Sanchez de Boado
3110 Lancer Drive
Hyattsville MD 20782
apboado@yahoo.com
(301) 559-2982

Daniel Broder
3929 Madison Street
Hyattsville, MD 20781
dnbroder@gmail.com
(202)491-1877

Melissa Schweisguth
5020 38th Ave
Hyattsville, MD 20782

Date: Wed, 26 Mar 2025 00:44:15 +0000 (UTC)
From: Alexi Boado <apboado@yahoo.com>
To: Greg Smith <gpsmith@igc.org>
Subject: sign me onto the request to joint request to disapprove or remand DSP 22001

Greg, please sign me onto the request to joint request to disapprove or remand DSP 22001.

Alexi

From: Melissa Schweisguth <melissa.schweisguth@gmail.com>
Date: Tue, 25 Mar 2025 21:45:04 -0400
Subject: Sign me onto the request to joint request to disapprove or remand DSP 22001
To: Greg Smith <gpsmith@igc.org>

Hello Greg

This email is to confirm that I wish to sign onto the written testimony:

"Subject: Request to Disapprove or Remand Detailed Site Plan 22001 – McDonald's on Ager Road" with a date of March 255, 2025.

thank you

Melissa Schweisguth
5020 38th Ave
Hyattsville, MD
(no phone or email included)