

Walker-Bey, James T.

From: Ben Simasek <bensimasek7@gmail.com>
Sent: Friday, February 16, 2024 7:26 AM
To: Brown, Donna J.; Clerk of the Council
Subject: Neighbors of the Northwest Branch Oppose DSP-21001
Attachments: NNWB Letter Opposing DSP-21001.pdf

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Hello Clerk Brown,

Please find attached a letter in opposition to the Suffrage Point South development from Neighbors of the Northwest Branch, a 501(c)(3) organization in Maryland. Thank you for sharing this testimony to the District Council for consideration as part of the February 26 hearing record on DSP-21001.

Respectfully,

Ben Simasek

Vice President for Prince George's County Neighbors of the Northwest Branch

<https://gcc02.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.neighborsnwb.org%2F&data=05%7C02%7CCLerkoftheCouncil%40co.pg.md.us%7C159ec12473ac40009f9d08dc2eea7e4a%7C4146bddaddc14d2aa1b21a64cc3c837b%7C0%7C0%7C638436831902511501%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWljiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzliLCJBTiI6I k1haWwiLCJXVCi6Mn0%3D%7C0%7C%7C%7C&sdata=8CGhrRVvMM7cy1K9%2B6MlcMerEEVhoiBm%2BLMFXXuJf1k%3D &reserved=0>

February 15, 2024

Donna J. Brown
Clerk of the County Council
Wayne K. Curry Administration Building
1301 McCormick Drive
Largo, MD 20774

Item: Suffrage Point - Request that the District Council Reverse the Prince George's County Planning Board's Approval of Detailed Site Plan 21001

Dear Ms. Brown,

We appreciate the District Council's thoughtful consideration of public testimony on DSP-21001. Neighbors of the Northwest Branch (NNWB) is a 501(c)(3) volunteer organization dedicated to the ecological restoration of the Northwest Branch of the Anacostia River, with members in Montgomery and Prince George's counties. We respectfully and strongly urge the District Council to deny the Detailed Site Plan submitted by Werrlein WSSC, LLC for its proposed Suffrage Point South development, located in the floodplain of the lower Northwest Branch.

Our request to deny DSP-21001 is based on our concerns about the applicant's past record of disregarding environmental regulations as well as the high risk of future environmental damage, given the project's failure to account for climate change. The Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE) lists the Northwest Branch and the Anacostia as impaired by sediment, biological oxygen demand, and other pollutants. Allowing this project to proceed would undermine the decades-long efforts of cross-jurisdictional governments and environmental groups (including NNWB) to restore the health of the Anacostia watershed as well as the Chesapeake Bay.

We cannot overstate how essential to the intertwined goals of ecosystem health and water quality it is to maintain and restore natural floodplains, wetlands, and riparian buffers. Given the site is part of Prince George's County's Green Infrastructure Network, approving this development would flagrantly contradict Policy 2 of the County's Green Infrastructure Plan, which states the county must "*preserve, protect and enhance surface and ground water features and restore lost ecological functions.*" When we consider how climate change is impacting our region, it becomes even more crucial to uphold this policy.

MDE's Comprehensive Assessment of Climate Change Impacts in Maryland underscores the threats posed to our aquatic ecosystems: "*More intense rainfall resulting from large-scale and localized (e.g., urban canopy) climate effects are likely to increase peak flooding in urban environments. Intensified rainfall events and warmer surfaces (roads, roofs, etc.) would result in rapid increases in stream temperatures, limiting habitat suitability for native fishes and other organisms. Degraded streams would transmit more nutrients and sediments to the Chesapeake Bay and its tidal tributaries.*"

Now 16 years after MDE's 2008 assessment, we are experiencing more frequent and extreme rainfall events and observing the resulting degradation of our waterways. These impacts will intensify in the coming decades, posing not only a severe threat to the ecosystem, but to the people who reside in and near floodplains.

Even expert climate scientists and engineers acknowledge the challenge in adequately assessing the risks. For this reason, the Prince George's County Climate Action Plan adopted in 2022 states: "*There is simply no certainty*

that today's engineering standards will be adequate into the future. Our county must stop the practice of permitting the reconfiguring of floodplain storage areas within a natural riverine system by creating alternate man-made storage to accommodate developments. This practice is unwise and it will be untenable if future precipitation patterns reveal that these modified storage areas are insufficient to accommodate flood waters." It would be catastrophically shortsighted to ignore this warning in 2024.

On the contrary, the County's Plan 2035 stresses that *"The County's development pattern has resulted in a greater need for carefully planned and designed green and open spaces. These public and semi-public spaces can provide multiple ecosystem services such as improving water and air quality, reducing the urban heat island effect, and reducing light pollution. They should be designed as multi-functional landscapes that can serve as gathering places while providing opportunities for the arts, urban agriculture, transportation facilities, and other community uses."*

The county made a wise decision in 2004 to designate the parcel in question as Open Space. Situated in the floodplain and adjacent to environmentally sensitive wetlands and a major public park, this site is ideal for providing these vital environmental and community services envisioned in Plan 2035. Reversing this zoning designation, thereby jeopardizing the natural ecosystem and shrinking the limited open space in an already densely populated area, was a serious error.

Our concerns about the effects of this project on our watershed are exacerbated by the applicant's dismal environmental track record. Since June 2020, following the grading of Suffrage Point's upper parcel, there have been dozens of documented instances of sediment pollution flowing from the site into public roadways and tributaries of the Northwest Branch. Site inspections of both the upper and lower parcels by MDE and Prince George's County Department of Permitting and Inspections have recurrently revealed Werrlein not in compliance with regulations. They have improperly stored mounds of sediment in the floodplain of the lower parcel without proper controls. They have repeatedly pushed ahead with demolition, grading, and excavating without the proper permits and approvals, in violation of the Clean Water Act and the Maryland Environmental Article.

Allowing the Suffrage Point South development to proceed will have disastrous downstream effects, literally and figuratively. Fortunately, it is not too late to pursue a more sensible and sustainable course.

Please act now to protect our local watershed and communities by denying DSP-21001.

Thank you,

Nora Swisher
President, Neighbors of the Northwest Branch
www.neighborsnwb.org