

Kensington Historical Society, Inc.
PO Box 453
Kensington, MD 20895
November 19, 2010



Dear Councilmember Ervin:

The Kensington Historical Society has a membership of over 200 citizens of Kensington and the surrounding community who are interested in safeguarding and promoting Kensington's heritage and historic resources as called for in our Charter. On behalf of the Kensington Historical Society Board, I have been asked to relay some concerns the Society has regarding the Planning Board's approved Kensington Sector Plan. The Planning Board did not fully respond to our comments and we appeal to you to protect the historic nature of our community.

We are concerned with the Kensington Sector Plan on two fronts: the specific possible damage to our Historic District; and the general damage of the possible density allowed in our plan, and in the surrounding plans, on our historic community.

Specifically, our concerns focus on the detrimental effects that the new pattern of taller buildings and high density will have on our Historic District. Our concern relates to preserving our open space, visual scale and massing on the streetscape.

- Parts of our Historic District will be directly affected if the proposed plan allows increased heights WITHIN THE HISTORIC DISTRICT to 50 feet. This area includes Antique Row: Armory Avenue, Fawcett St., Montgomery Avenue, and Howard Avenue from the Safeway block down to Kensington Parkway. On Antique Row we have one and two story buildings (some with apartments above retail) and several 100 year old houses/buildings which are currently successful commercial establishments. In fact, this area is called out in the Plan as our successful Antique Row – a magnet for tourists and shoppers. Zoning for Howard Avenue should remain at the retail plus apartment height to be *consistent with the historic streetscape*.
- The area on the South side of Knowles Avenue which abuts residents' homes and the Historic District should not be at heights that diminish those properties. To have tall, high density buildings surrounding the corner of Detrick and Knowles would destroy the sense of place one enters just one block off of Knowles. This neighborhood has limited access, is residential and includes a primary core of the Kensington Historic District. Therefore, it is important to require a step-down transition in scale between the commercial and residential areas which befits good design.

We are grateful for many of the recommendations in the plan on the issues of Design, Environment, and Diversity. However, we feel that under the

Connectivity recommendation, the traffic issue has still not received enough attention, particularly considering other plans for the surrounding areas. The Town's current infrastructure, especially streets as they currently exist (with no changes in the foreseeable future) are not adequate. Who will pay for wholesale improvements, and when? We have heavy development already approved to our west (White Flint), to our east (Wheaton), and to our south (the Walter Reed relocation) and the Chevy Chase Lake Sector Plan is promoting more. All of these developments will dramatically increase the volume of traffic that will move through our town, through intersections that are already failing. Add to that the density proposed for Kensington and, we fear, all our efforts for a greener community will go up in automobile exhaust. Ironically, these same needs to control traffic were cited in the 1978 Sector Plan, yet were *never* addressed successfully. The new Plan repeats that error. In 1978, the only concrete measure with regard to transportation was to **not** make this a transit center in an effort to protect the Town.

We appreciate the identification of possible new historic districts and are reviewing this with the Town. We have submitted a nomination for the Kensington Cabin on Kensington Parkway to be designated on the Montgomery County Master Plan for Historic Preservation. It has been approved by the Historic Preservation Commission and the Planning Board and we look forward to approval by the County Council.

There are many pages in the Kensington Sector Plan which talk about "preserving Kensington's scale and historic character," starting with p.1. Under Design, p.11, the Plan states "scale is a fundamental tenet of urban design and defines how people think about the spaces they move through and how they perceive the built environment. The neighborhoods of Kensington and its Antique Row illustrate the Town's scale." Details of the Plan do not reflect this statement, and it is these certain details that deserve more thoughtful consideration.

In this area of suburban sprawl, Kensington is unique. Please give us a Sector Plan that will consistently protect and enhance that quality.

With Best Regards,
Julia O'Malley, President
Kensington Historical Society