

January 14, 2013

Ms. Renee Kamen
Senior Planner, Development Revision Division
Montgomery County Planning Department
8787 Georgia Avenue.
Silver Spring, MD 20910

email: Renee.Kamen@mncppc-mc.org
Subject: Special Exception application S-2863, Costco gas station

Dear Ms. Kamen,

Thank you for allowing me to submit this letter as part of the official record. I live in the Stephen Knolls neighborhood and am strongly opposed to the proposed Costco gas station. I will try to be brief while still covering what I believe are many of the major concerns about the proposed gas station.

Need:

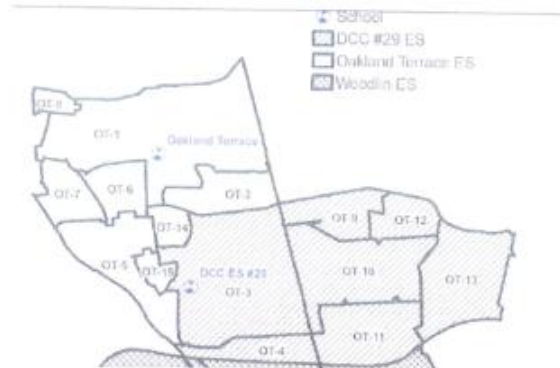
My understanding is that there must be an established need for this gas station. As a resident in the area, I always fill up at a local gas station. Over the past year, I have never encountered a line at a gas station, shortage of gas, lack of service, or any reason to believe that we are in need of another gas station. The placement of the current gas stations is shown below by the red point marks. As you will see there are six gas stations on major roadways within .5 miles of the proposed Costco. If the proposed gas station was not a Costco gas station but another Shell or Freestate would we be discussing the "need?" I believe that there is no justification for yet another small gas station in the Wheaton area and I am confident you will agree. The fact there is no need for a small gas station highlights that there is even less need for Montgomery County's largest gas station. What Costco has established is there is a want for their cheap gas but as we all learned as children, a want is not a need and the price of gas is not an established criteria under the special exception process for determining need. Therefore, the testimony of citizens explaining that "cheap gas" is a need is unfounded, as price, which is not stable, is not a determining factor of need.



Health

As you may know, there are many recent scientific studies that highlight the danger of living close to a gas station due to the increased exposure to benzene.ⁱ I have included a small number of documents in the endnotes including US government advisories from the EPA and CDC.

The Kensington Heights and Stephen Knolls neighborhoods are both family dense. This is highlighted by the recent establishment of a new elementary school DCC #29 which helps alleviate the overcrowding in Oakland Terrace ES. Now Oakland Terrace will draw from a smaller area (see Montgomery County boundary map)ⁱⁱ but unfortunately a significant part of this area falls within 1000 feet of the proposed Costco gas station, the established area considered safe in California for large (over 3.6 million gallons per year) gas stations, including my home.



Our neighborhood has hundreds of children. In fact on my street alone with only 12 houses we have 14 children and all but two are 6 and under, living on our block. Young children are particularly vulnerable to the impacts of benzene, including the elevated cancer risk. The placement of Montgomery County's largest gas station must be done in a well thought-out and careful manner and pressed against an established neighborhood, backing up to both single-family and townhomes is not well-planned and is in contradiction to Montgomery County's own Growth Policy Amendment enacted July 20, 2010ⁱⁱⁱ.

Kensington Heights and Stephen Knolls Community

The KH and SK communities are two diverse neighborhoods with a large multi-ethnic population. Many of the newer residents are young families that have moved from Washington, DC and other parts of the country to live in a semi-urban area with access to public transportation, good schools, and great neighbors. Our family recently left our NW apartment near the Cathedral in Washington, DC. We are exactly the type of family the Wheaton Sector Plan hopes to attract. We make a combined income of over \$125K, have two children, and made a conscious decision to live AWAY from 495 because of health concerns due to air pollution near major highways. We want a thriving community and we know that a gas station will lower home values, decrease the attractiveness of our neighborhood, and in fact, we will very likely consider moving if the gas station is placed due to very real concern about air quality. I have spoken with many neighbors who feel the same and are waiting to see what will happen. If a large number of homes begin to sell, the gas station will turn what was a stable community into a undesirable place to live. This will reduce home values, can change the make up of the school system which was carefully crafted based on a STABLE community, and will result in a Wheaton Sector Plan that will be increasingly difficult to achieve. Our community is a significant factor in the ability of Wheaton to progress. If KH and SK begin to deteriorate, all of Wheaton will be impacted. Changes to KH and SK should not be taken lightly.

Other Costco Gas stations

Costco continues to reference other gas stations as examples of why the Wheaton gas station should not be a concern, however when you look at the siting of other Costco gas stations, you can see that none is as close as the Wheaton site. The siting of Montgomery County's largest gas station so close to an existing neighborhood with homes built as long as 60+ years ago is disturbing. The fact that the County Council would put such a small price on the families, homes, and home values of this extremely diverse neighborhood is upsetting at best. .



Proposed Wheaton station



Sterling, VA



Brandywine, MD

Glen Burnie Warehouse

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Glen Burnie, MD

There are numerous other concerns about this gas station, including the potential placement so close to a school for children with special needs. There are also social justice concerns considering that Wheaton is Montgomery County's most diverse area and may be the location of the largest gas station. The reasons NOT to place the gas station here are numerous. The reasons for the Costco gas station are limited to Costco and their desire to increase business (not a consideration for need) and the desire by residents for cheap gas (also not a consideration for need).

Please be thoughtful in your decision and recommendation. It is critical that justified reasons are taken into account and that the science, potential harm, make of up the community, large number of children, school for children with special needs, location of homes less than 125 feet, home values, and more are taken into consideration when making your final decision. The price of gas should not be a factor!

Thank you for your attention to our community,

Sincerely,

Andrea Santy

2508 Jennings Court

Silver Spring, MD 20902

301-949-1832

ⁱ 1) Correa et al. *The impact of BTEX emissions from gas stations into the atmosphere.* Atmospheric Pollution Research 3 (2012) 163-169.

2) Volk et al. *Residential proximity to freeways and autism in the CHARGE study.* Environ Health Perspect. 2011 Jun;119(6):873-7. <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/21156395>

3) Agency for Toxic Substance and Disease Registry, <http://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/substances/toxsubstance.asp?toxid=14>.

4) PA Man Dies Pumping Gas After Static Electricity Starts Fire, Associated Press, Published March 09, 2010, Fox News: <http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,588605,00.html>

5) Gasoline Service Station Industrywide Risk Assessment Guidelines <http://www.arb.ca.gov/ab2588/rrap-iwra/GasIWRA.pdf>

6) EPA Publication - Risk Assessment for Toxic Air Pollutants: A Citizen's Guide - EPA 450/3-90-024 March 1991. http://www.epa.gov/airquality/air_risc/3_90_024.html

ⁱⁱ <http://www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/boe/meetings/agenda/2011-12/2011-1117/3.0%20Boundary%20Recommendation%20DCC%20Elem%20School%2029.pdf>

ⁱⁱⁱ http://www6.montgomerycountymd.gov/content/council/pdf/bill/2010/20100720_38-09.pdf