

SECTION 3 OF THE VILLAGE OF CHEVY CHASE

P.O. Box 15070

Chevy Chase

Maryland 20815

301/656-9117

www.chevychasesection3.org

December 15, 2022

Montgomery County Planning Board & Staff
2425 Reedie Dr. 14th floor
Wheaton, MD 20902

Re: Section 3 Comments on the Corso Chevy Chase Development Proposal

Members of the Montgomery County Planning Board and Staff:

These comments are submitted on behalf of the Village of Chevy Chase, Section 3 ("Section 3"), an incorporated municipality in Montgomery County, MD. Section 3 directly faces the proposed new development Corso Chevy Chase. There are six single family homes and the Chevy Chase United Methodist Church opposite the site.

While Connecticut Avenue is technically a state highway, in our neighborhood it is lined by single family homes. Section 3 has three major areas of concern regarding the proposed Corso Chevy Chase development, all of which have a direct impact on our community:

1. Traffic safety;
2. Setbacks and building heights; and
3. Density.

In our letter of August 29, 2022 to the Corso Chevy Chase developers (attached as Exhibit 1), we outlined these concerns. We have also reiterated our concerns to the developers at a Section 3 Council meeting on November 9, 2022. Unfortunately, the developers' LMA does not address these previously voiced concerns.

Traffic

The current Corso proposal is for a single entry on the west side of Connecticut Ave. just south of Taylor St. and a separate exit approximately 30 feet to the south. A pedestrian cross walk would be located between the entrance and the exit. Despite the planned vehicular traffic and

pedestrian walkway, neither the entrance nor the exit would have the benefit of a traffic control signal. This is not workable.

At a time when the county and the planning board are busy finding ways to promote Vision Zero and pedestrian safety, the Corso plan shows an unsignalized entry and exit with a crosswalk sandwiched in between. The plan, as proposed, forces those entering the facility from the south to block the far left, northbound lane of Connecticut Ave., even during peak hours until they have clearance of the three southbound lanes of Connecticut. Those leaving the site to go north must cross three southbound lanes, often hugely congested, and enter the northbound fast lane, in order to go north towards the Beltway. Respectfully, this makes no sense.

A safer solution is to normalize the intersection at the Corso development and have a single entry /exit at Taylor St., where a light could be installed and a proper crosswalk could be placed. If there is need for a second entry point to the Corso development for fire trucks, other emergency vehicles, and suppliers, a service road could be placed farther south on Connecticut Ave. and perhaps adjacent to the pedestrian pathways until it veers off to the perimeter roadway and the loading points delineated in the recent submission. Alternatively, a second emergency entrance could be placed on a side street.

A traffic signal would enable safer transit on Connecticut Ave. for all concerned. It would avoid the inevitable U-turns that would be made by those who exit to the south but really want to go north. Finally, it would enable pedestrians from the facility and from Sections 3 and 5 to safely cross Connecticut Ave. at Taylor St. Otherwise, the nearest safe crosswalk with a light is a long block away from Corso Chevy Chase at the intersection of Raymond St. and Rosemary St. This area has already been the site of a pedestrian fatality.

Several recent pedestrian fatalities on state highways in our area have been attributed to a lack of safe signalized crosswalks. Representatives of the State Highway Administration endorse this position as to the alignment of a single entry/exit at Taylor St. being a safer option. SHA traffic engineer, Kwesi Woodroffe, Regional Engineer, District 3 Access Management, MDOT State Highway Administration has stated, **“The main concern is the separated access points which creates a somewhat offset intersection with Taylor St. We feel it would be beneficial for both motorist and pedestrian safety and mobility to have one standard access point opposite Taylor St. which would create a typical 4-way intersection. Because of the number of lanes a driver would need to cross to make a left into, or out of the site, the intersection may need to be signalized.”** (See full email attached as Exhibit 2) (emphasis added).

The forgoing comments are relevant to the development once constructed. But the construction is now predicted to take up to 4 years. Both construction trucks plying Connecticut Ave. for approximately four years, and then the residents of Corso Chevy Chase and their neighbors will need a simple, clear single entry and exit tied to a normalized intersection for the sake of both motorists and pedestrians. We would like that single entry exit point to be a required element for the safety of the larger community.

Setbacks and Heights

In their land use report, the developers make a point of saying that they have designed the facility to be compatible with and complementary to the surrounding residential neighborhoods. This is not accurate. The setbacks are not compatible with the neighborhood. The developers' plan protects residents of the Town of Chevy Chase by placing a significant distance between the planned facility and single-family homes. The undeveloped setbacks on the north, west and south sides of the property are 81 feet on Thornapple St. and 145 feet at the back, and even more and the back southwest part of the property because of the forest conservation easement and an unbuildable ravine. However, the planned buildings facing Connecticut Ave. do not respect the local setbacks of 25 feet within the Town of Chevy Chase or 30 feet in Section 3. As currently planned, the southernmost building of the Corso development is a mere 18 feet from the property line, which is less than the setback required for even a residence in the R60 zone in which they propose to build, much less for the very large building proposed. The close proximity of a four story, 60' tall building along Connecticut Ave., with regular bump-outs close to the sidewalk, makes those structures loom ominously over the street and facing residential structures that are only 30-35' feet high in Section 3. Were the buildings set back much further, the extreme height would not be so dramatic. The assisted living high-rise Five Star Premier Residences at 8100 Connecticut Ave. is set back considerably more as is the condominium opposite at 8101 Connecticut Ave. There is no reason that the overall setback from Connecticut Ave. could not be much greater than now envisioned. With a single entry and exit, the buildings could be set back farther and closer to the entry/exit point or could expand into the broad side setbacks. Were the density lower, the need for such large buildings would be diminished as well. If the developers really are committed to a plan compatible with the existing community, they should significantly pull back the buildings from the Connecticut Ave.

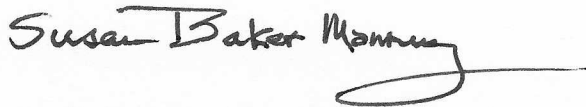
We would ask at a minimum that both buildings fronting Connecticut Ave. be at least 50 feet from the property line. The 60-foot height proposed, even with the pitched roof, is not compatible with the surrounding residential properties. Were the height lower, it would be more compatible with the surrounding neighborhood.

Density

Re-arrangement of the building setbacks on Connecticut Ave. and their height along with a better placement of those two front buildings around a single entry/exit would allow for a service roadway. But to make that re-arrangement easier, it may be that the developers need to reconsider the densities proposed. We cannot recommend the appropriate number of units and we realize that economics come into play here, but many of the objections raised by the Town, the County's planners, and Section 3 could in part be ameliorated by a reduction in the number of units proposed.

We ask that you consider these issues in depth as they affect not just the Town of Chevy Chase but every resident in Section 3 and the neighboring jurisdictions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Susan Baker Manning". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal line extending from the end of the name.

Susan Baker Manning, Chair

Section 3 of the Village of Chevy Chase

Cc: Council Members, Section 3 of the Village of Chevy Chase

Andy Leon Harney, Village Manager

Grant Epstein, Community Three

Subject: RE: LMA H-148 for review

From: Kwesi Woodroffe <KWoodroffe@mdot.maryland.gov>

Date: 12/1/2022, 1:52 PM

To: "Bogdan, Grace" <grace.bogdan@montgomeryplanning.org>, "Torma, Rebecca"

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CC: "Dickel, Stephanie" <Stephanie.Dickel@montgomeryplanning.org>, "Gatling, Tsaiquan"

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Leon Harney <villagemanager@chevyCHASEsection3.org>, Larry Lanpher

<lawrence.lanpher@klgates.com>

Good afternoon Grace,

This slipped by me, but I wanted to provide some preliminary concerns/ feedback.

The main concern is the separated access points which creates a somewhat offset intersection with Taylor St. We feel it would be beneficial for both motorist and pedestrian safety and mobility to have one standard access point opposite Taylor St which would create a typical 4-way intersection. Because of the number of lanes a driver would need to cross to make a left into, or out of the site, the intersection may need to be signalized. This concept would perhaps allow for a separate access point for loading/deliveries. If not, we would simply recommend a right-in/ right-out access point.

Again, my apologies for getting this feedback to you so late.

Thanks, Kwesi

Kwesi Woodroffe

Regional Engineer

District 3 Access Management

MDOT State Highway Administration

KWoodroffe@mdot.maryland.gov

301-513-7347 (Direct)

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Office Hours

M-Thurs.: 6:30a-3:30p

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29 August 2022

Grant Epstein
President
Community Three Development
700 K St. NW, Suite 350
Washington, DC 20001

Re: Corso Chevy Chase

Dear Grant,

Thank you for your willingness to talk with Section 3 residents about the planned Corso Chevy Chase development, and hope to have an opportunity for you to do so in September. In the interim, however, and prior to your application to the County Planning Board for a Local Map Amendment, I wanted to take this opportunity to share some of the feedback we've received from our residents. Based on outreach to Section 3 residents, a survey, and input at council meetings, there are several areas of concern—including traffic, parking, massing, setbacks, and density—that we hope you will address.

Traffic. Section 3 residents have raised questions and concerns about Corso Chevy Chase's effect on local traffic, including (1) increased traffic on the already-congested Connecticut Ave., and (2) the high probability of cut-through traffic in our community, particularly on Taylor St.

We are also concerned that the existing entry and exit that you propose to maintain is not workable. While the existing configuration may have been serviceable for the low numbers of vehicles entering and leaving the 4-H Center, the situation will be quite different with the levels of traffic Corso Chevy Chase will undoubtedly draw. The current configuration forces all those exiting the site to go south on Connecticut Ave. even if their destination is to the north. The only legal way for a southbound car on Connecticut Ave. to turn the other direction is to go around Chevy Chase Circle, a distance of roughly one mile, or do a roundabout cut through in one of the communities along Connecticut Ave.

Realistically, drivers are likely to make an unauthorized U-turn at Rosemary St. or one of the several other streets between the site and Chevy Chase Circle. And during the two years of construction, large numbers of construction vehicles going south on Connecticut Ave. until Chevy Chase Circle or, worse, trying to make a U-turn at one of the cross streets is not a viable solution.

We are also concerned about pedestrian access to the facility. In the absence of a signal, and with the nearest signalized crosswalk approximately .3 miles to the south, there is a high risk that pedestrians will attempt to cut cross all six lanes of Connecticut Ave. traffic at or near Taylor St.

We think a signalization study is vitally important, and should be completed early in the process so that any appropriate modifications of the plans can be made in order to maximize safety. Is such a study going to be done and, if so, what are the criteria to be used?

Parking: Since the bulk of the parking in the proposed plan is underground, there is concern among our residents that spillover parking will occur on Section 3 streets, particularly Taylor St. which is also threatened by potential cut-through traffic. The three commercial businesses that you propose plus the

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theater will all be open to the public. However, there doesn't seem to be sufficient above grade parking for those facilities. If they are to be viable, these businesses will have to draw on the larger community, not all of whom will be pedestrians or take advantage of (limited) public transportation. It's also possible that employees might choose to park on nearby streets. It is important that the plans incorporate sufficient on-site parking for residents, employees, and visitors of all kinds.

Massing & Setbacks: Section 3 requires front setbacks of 30' and the Town of Chevy Chase generally requires a 25' front setback. Under County regulations, the maximum height of a home is between 30' and 35' tall depending on specific roof configuration. As you know, the 4-H Center is set back significantly from Connecticut Avenue, with large greenspaces and recreation areas near the street. However, the draft plans for Corso Chevy Chase place several five story buildings at about 18' from the front setback much closer to the sidewalk and street than homes in the area. If implemented, this would not be compatible with the neighborhood and would create a looming and unwelcome presence for Section 3 residents across the street. While we understand that the Town of Chevy Chase has urged the developers to maintain greenspace as, in effect, a three-sided buffer zone between the Corso Chevy Chase buildings and Town residents. This is appropriate, but should not come at the cost of eliminating green space on the fourth side facing Connecticut Ave. and Section 3.

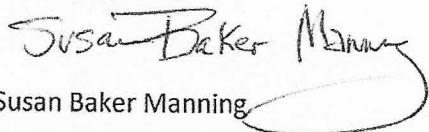
Five stories is not residential height and we would prefer the setback to be in keeping with the overriding pattern in the neighborhood. We feel strongly that buildings close to Connecticut Avenue should be more in keeping with the pattern of setbacks well established in the community. And we note that the senior living facility at 8100 Connecticut Ave., which is located next to the Columbia Country Club golf course and in a less residential environment, is set back significantly from front property line.

Density. As we understand it, the total number of planned units is currently 507, up from the 400-450 originally envisioned. This level of density only underscores our concerns regarding traffic, and lessen the pressure toward large buildings closer to the road. We urge you to consider lowering the number of units to put less stress on the site and on the surrounding communities.

Before the local map amendment application is submitted, we urge you to re-examine the access and circulation plans, the setbacks, heights near Connecticut Ave. and the densities now under consideration.

We look forward to your comments response to the issues noted above, and hope that we can work together to find viable solutions to these challenges.

Sincerely yours,



Susan Baker Manning