

Old Town Civic Association

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OCT 04 2010

1 October 2010

4715 Norwich Road
College Park, MD 20740

City of College Park
City Council & Mayor
C/o Ms. Janeen S. Miller, City Clerk
4500 Knox Road
College Park, MD 20740

RECEIVED

OCT 05 2010

CITY OF COLLEGE PARK
PLANNING DEPARTMENT

MTC
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Re: Old Town Civic Association's recommendation regarding proposed development of the Maryland Book Exchange site.

To the Honorable Mayor Fellows and City Council Members:

The Old Town Civic Association (OTCA) has met twice within the last five weeks to discuss the development proposed for the Maryland Book Exchange site. By unanimous vote (24-0) on September 27, 2010, the OTCA recommends that you do *not approve* Zusin Development's proposal for the Maryland Book Exchange site.

At the OTCA meeting on August 25, the developer asked OTCA to form a committee to meet with them to discuss their ideas for how they could mitigate/eliminate the negative impacts of their proposed development on the community.

The committee was comprised of Chris Aubry, Steve Brayman, Jim McFadden, and Bob Schnabel. Eve Mueller also served but was unable to attend the meetings. District 3 Council Members Stephanie Stulich and Mark Cook also attended. The committee met with the developer on September 8 and 20.

The committee and the developer could not come to consensus regarding OTCA's central concern – that the influx of at least 835 undergraduates will profoundly and negatively impact our neighborhood, as this new population will swell the ranks of the house parties that are already straining our nerves and the resources of the city.

Nor could the committee agree with developer regarding what economic/commercial impact would result from their project. The developer claims an economic benefit as more customers would reside in the commercial district, while OTCA believes the influx of up to 1,000 more undergraduates would symbolize "kiss of death," for College Park's downtown, as the likelihood of more upscale, adult-oriented eateries and shops would be forever lost to sandwich shops and fast food venues, the markets of choice targeted to undergraduates. If downtown is completely dominated by undergraduate residents, it will not attract more diverse retail. If this project goes forward, the opportunity to change the nature of downtown will be lost forever.

Parking concerns were noted by the OTCA. The developer insists their intent to attract renters without cars by emphasizing/facilitating bicycle and shared vehicular transport, but no guarantees or strategies were provided to demonstrate how this *will* be achieved, only that it is their sincere hope. The committee is not convinced that students would voluntarily choose not to bring their vehicles.

The developer stated that his group was not interested in building hotels or a retail-exclusive project. Economic restraints prohibited the developer from agreeing to the committee's other suggestions.

Thus, after two meetings, the committee determined that they were at an impasse with the Developer and decided to report back to the Civic Association after two meetings.

Our situation at present is extremely perilous. We shall be completely marginalized and without hope should this project go forward. Old Town's student population is estimated at 1,100.¹ The proposed building would instantly almost double that population. Consider this in conventional terms – the project equates to an additional 200 homes with 5 residents per home suddenly being added into a situation which has only recently begun to get slightly better. Although we certainly expect to continue to have many students living in our neighborhood, and some students have been very good neighbors, the neighborhood suffers greatly from an extreme party atmosphere that prevails on many nights and weekends and severely harms the quality of life for many residents.

Although the developer is proposing to reserve 1/3 of the building for visiting faculty, young professionals, and graduate students, this plan actually accounts for less than 17% of the proposed number of beds. The ratio is too low and the ratio is not guaranteed.

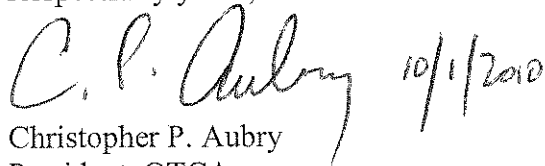
Abidance with the Sector Plan is often cited by the developer. Some members of the committee as well as County officials maintain that a careful reading of the Sector Plan indicates that the project as proposed does not conform to the spirit or the substance of what was envisioned for College Park.

Finally, we wish to note that in the past we have been supportive of building new student housing to address the student housing shortage that has existed for many years. We are pleased to note that new student housing has provided over 7,000 additional beds over the past 10 years, including 1,100 in the two buildings that opened this fall. In addition, three buildings currently under construction will provide another 2,300 beds beginning in the Fall of 2011. However, we cannot support the proposed development at the Maryland Book Exchange, as it is likely to have grave and irreversible impacts on our community.

We urge you do not approve the Zusin project for the Maryland Book Exchange.

On behalf of the committee and the Old Town Civic Association, I remain

Respectfully yours,


Christopher P. Aubry
President, OTCA

¹ Best guess based on extrapolating from rental properties dbase, parking permits issued, and parking density of Old Town (two last from Jim Miller's office.) City does not possess the informational tools to provide such a report.