

# Minutes

Sandy Spring Civic Association  
Ross Body Community Center, Sandy Spring, MD 20860  
(Meeting Virtually by Zoom during Covid-19 Pandemic)

June 14, 2021 (by Zoom, for 14<sup>th</sup> month in a row)

**Attendance:** Board Members – Dr. Daryl Thorne, President; Basile “Whit” Whitaker, Vice President; Christine Hill Wilson, Treasurer; Audrey Dutton, Parliamentarian (absent); Douglas Farquhar, Recording and Correspondence Secretary

**Attendance:** General body – Approximately 12

**Guests:** Patrick Butler, Upcounty Division Chief, Montgomery County Planning Department; Molline Jackson, Planner Coordinator, Upcounty Division, Fairland and Briggs Chaney Master Plan Co-Lead

Attendance Total (approximate): 17

**Meeting called to order:** 6:33 p.m. by Daryl

## Agenda

Minutes of the May 10, 2021 membership meeting were approved.

### **Speaker from Montgomery County Planning Department:**

Patrick Butler, Upcounty Division Chief, Montgomery County Planning Department, spoke and delivered a PowerPoint Presentation (attached) about the zoning and planning process in Montgomery County. He was accompanied by Molline Jackson, Planner Coordinator, Upcounty Division, Fairland and Briggs Chaney Master Plan Co-Lead. Mr. Butler began by stating that the Planning Department works for the residents of the County, and that the Planning Department shapes the environment. The Planning Department is a branch of the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission, one of the few bi-county agencies in Maryland. He generally described what Master Plans are, how they are created, and how they function, noting that relatively recent master plans had been approved for Sandy Spring and Ashton. He then talked about the types of specific documents that affect development of specific properties, noting that the Montgomery County Office of Zoning and Administrative Hearings holds hearings on conditional uses and Special Exceptions, as well as on accessory apartments. The County Council adopts Zoning Text Amendments, Master Plans, and Local Map Amendments (slide 10).

At one point, Mr. Butler stopped to answer a question: **How do Planning staff interact differently with developers, applicants, and the community?** Mr. Butler responded that developers are generally looking for the highest and best use of the property, whereas communities are generally concerned about amenities associated with a development, with housing options, with ensuring the streets are safe. Mr. Butler said that the Planning Department tries to address

community needs and concerns, but the property owners are entitled to certain development densities and types of development under the zoning codes, and while the “feel and look of a community” are important, as is traffic impact, there is a limited amount that Planning Staff can do. Mr. Butler then resumed the presentation, and provided a list of different statutory provisions and regulations that govern the zoning and planning process.

**Other questions:** Mr. Butler was informed by one speaker that the community was extremely upset that community concerns expressed broadly and repeatedly did not seem to have a significant impact in the recent Ashton Rural Village Sector Plan, and asked how we could ensure that the community is involved in the planning process. Mr. Butler said that people should make sure they write and attend meetings to comment, and feel free to reach out to planning staff with any questions. What does the community need to do to have impact? Mr. Butler said to express concerns early, often, and in a sustained manner.

Two other speakers, Andrea Guy McFarland and Dr. Daryl Thorne, then stated that the community was ignored on the Ashton Plan, and were treated like kids, by the County Council, which claimed community concerns had significant impact on the plan while ignoring the major changes the community sought in the plan. Andrea noted that the townhouses being built on Porter Road were way too large for the community, and that a lot of time was spent on insignificant things in the planning process, while the two latest developments (Ashton Market and the Ashton Village Center) are unacceptable. “Why is my voice not being heard?” she asked, while the “developers are getting the yesses.”

Mr. Butler responded that the Master Plan for Ashton has been adopted, and we “need to remind” planning staff of the protections in the plan during the development review process. Ms. Jackson noted that the Master Plan calls for a village concept, and any development inconsistent with that concept should be opposed by the community.

Basile Whitaker echoed the disappointment with the planning process, and asked if there were any communities in Montgomery County where the process worked right. “What did they do,” he asked. The planners responded that the Town of Kensington was involved early in the planning process and steered the process to an acceptable conclusion.

Elizabeth Thornton added that the community spoke “with one voice,” and she was “so bitterly disgruntled” over the way that the community’s wishes were ignored. She said that the developer is not easy to work with, and the result allowed by the Ashton Plan “in no way resembles what we asked for.”

### **Other Business**

The Treasurer’s Report for the end of May was accepted (it is attached).

The Ross Boddy Community Center is reopening for summer programs for seniors and youth.

Marie Slater note that the docket for Vision Zero remains open for comments until June 21.

Paula Glendening asked for people to provide photos of where it is dangerous to walk along roads.

Whit said that he is working on a political primer and some presentations about County elections. He said that we should be holding the Council accountable for approval of the Ashton Plan, which is wholeheartedly rejected by our community. He noted that the primary for local offices will be on June 8, 2022, and briefly discussed the progress of the County redistricting plan.

The meeting adjourned at 8:06 p.m.