

Sayers, Margery

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Sent: Saturday, January 29, 2022 1:30 AM
To: CouncilMail
Cc: Walsh, Elizabeth; Shaina Hernandez; calvinball@howardcountmd.gov
Subject: RE CR16

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Dear Chair and Council,

I oppose the sale of the 1100+/- square foot public property located on Main Street in Ellicott City.

If it is being considered for a liability reason, I would argue that it is a liability for the county to lose control of land critical to the safety of the visitors and businesses along Main Street. It will also be a liability to the County if they fail to enforce the easement from being blocked. If the County believes it is a liability to lease the land to a restaurant because of flood threat, it is also a liability for them to knowingly sell them the land. And, if it's a liability to lease it because alcohol is involved, then perhaps consider leasing them the land but don't allow alcohol to be served at the outdoor tables. Or better yet, encourage or incentivize the construction of a roof top deck instead. How great would that be?!

In terms of safety, a 7' easement seems insufficient to evacuate a Main Street crowd, whether from fire, flood or train derailment. Specific to flooding, see Figure 34 of the approved Ellicott City Watershed Master Plan. The cluster of red asterisks highlight stream constriction points and floodwater flows directly at the site location. Could more flood relief/remediation projects that could be utilized in this alley? Shouldn't we at least wait until we are further along in our flood work before making this decision?

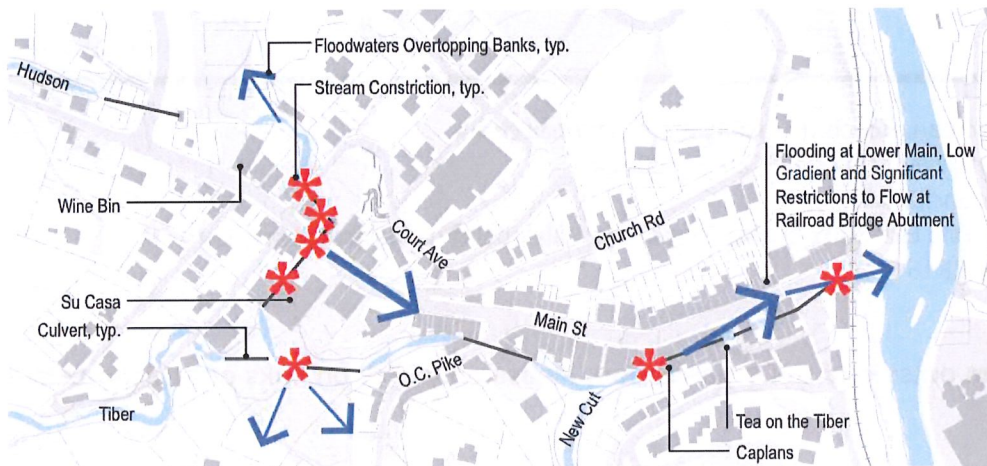
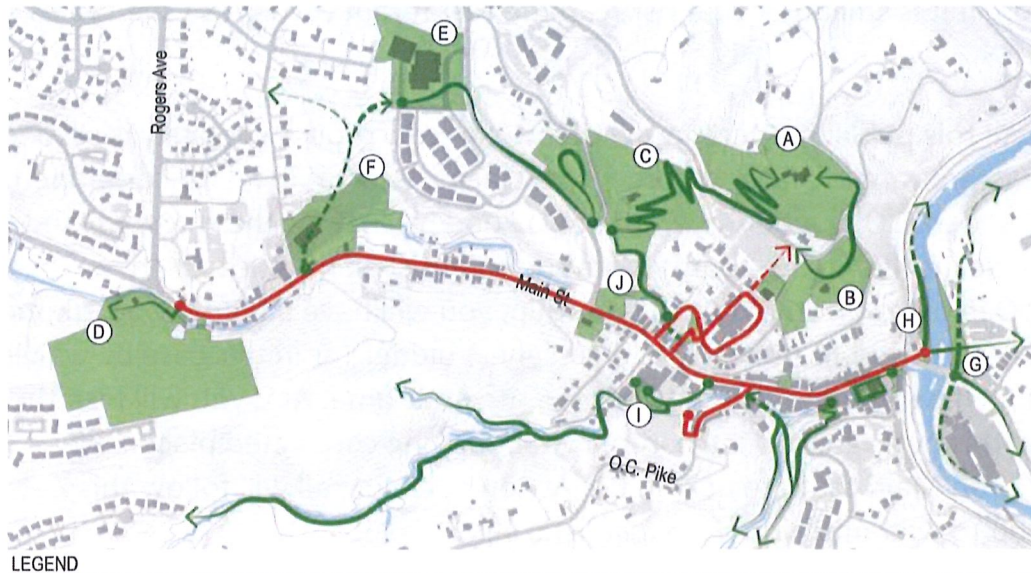


Figure 34: Stream Constriction Points and Floodwater Flows in the Downtown Core

This "alley" is key operational space that fronts to Main Street.

From a connection perspective, the Master Plan is clear about the potential use of public spaces in Ellicott City and this property's role in primary pedestrian networks and as the key connection between Main Street and the Courthouse complex, or what the plan authors called the "acropolis". Constricting this main pedestrian connector can harm the vision of a united Ellicott City and leave a divided town. Uptown. Downtown. Will visitors to the new retail shops and businesses in the courthouse location find their way down to Main, or just park where it's easier and stay uphill? In figure 38, the plan sees this space as part of the "Green Cultural Trail Network" and in 1.7 (attached below) the plan talks about linking public spaces and connecting "historic and cultural resources (physically and programmatically) to allow for a broader understanding." via this route.



LEGEND








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|---|--|-----------------------------------|
|  | Primary County-Owned Property and Opportunity Sites | (A) Patapsco Female Institute |
|  | Significant Publicly and Privately-Owned Cultural Resources to Consider in Overall Planning Context (Protection, Views, Connections, Etc.) | (B) Mt. Ida |
|  | Existing and Future Open Space Opportunities (Public and Private Properties to Consider in Overall Planning Context) | (C) Bernard Fort House |
|  | Significant Private Property Opportunity Sites, Should Current Uses Ever Change | (D) Ellicott City Colored School |
|  | Relationship/Connection Between Opportunity Sites | (E) Roger Carter Community Center |
|  | Urban "Main Street" Pedestrian/Bicycle Experience Along Streetscape | (F) West End Service |
|  | "Green Cultural Trail" Pedestrian/Bicycle Experience Linking Open Spaces | (G) Oella Riverfront |
| | | (H) Lot B |
| | | (I) Lot D |
| | | (J) Lot F |

Figure 31: "Green Cultural Trail" Network, Opportunity Sites, Open Space and Pedestrian/Bicycle Connections

From a highest and best use perspective, the Master Plan is clear about the use of public space. See 1.4 below which discusses public realm design, amenities and user comforts. Is there anything in this list that the could benefit the public on that piece of public property? Seating? Shade trees? Water features? Public Art? Public restrooms? Bike storage? telecommunications? Pop-up makers markets or vendor spaces?

Will there be restrictions on what the new owners will do, or will we see building additions, rails or fences to this space that will create a 7' hallway for egress? Is a 7' hallway conducive to shoppers and visitors moving between the Courthouse and Main, or is it narrow and uninviting? Will the new owner be required to only use flood-safe and secured fixtures so that chairs and tables don't become flood borne? Will they be required to only use the space for outdoor dining?

Why now? Why can't we wait for a few years to see what is happening with the Courthouse? Why is it a risk now to lease it to a restaurant owner, but not a risk now to allow him to use it? The County leases Ag land to people who operate heavy machinery. How is that risk different than this risk? Is it alcohol related? If so, how is this done in other areas successfully? Annapolis is an

example and Frederick, too. If it is still deemed a risk, can the restaurant owner use the tables but not serve alcohol outside?

It seems shortsighted to sell this public property now, before the courthouse property is settled, before the flood control systems are in place, before we've started executing major components of the master plan. If you had a CDO maybe this would be a good project for them to own and ensure good public use while insulating the county from the liability risk from leasing to a restaurant. Without a CDO in place or other oversight group, you will have a lot of opportunities to think about the sales of critical public property to the highest bidder (or in this case by waiving the bidding requirements). Chipping away at the town one site at a time. And you will lose the opportunity to help shape this beleaguered town into a vital, thriving connected place. The Courthouse, the properties on Main that are now in County ownership... all will follow this example. I'd encourage you to wait until you have a holistic plan.

Until then, please don't sell key public space that fronts to Main Street and is the main pedestrian connector to the acropolis. It is a small piece but an important piece to the puzzle.

Sincerely,

Mary Catherine Cochran

1.4 PUBLIC REALM DESIGN, AMENITIES AND USER COMFORTS. Design public spaces and park enhancements with a sensitivity to their context, potential for activation by a broad range of people, flexibility, durability, user comforts, and potential for interpretation and education on a variety of topics.

Implementing Actions

- a. Community Engagement: Engage relevant stakeholders and user groups in the design of public spaces
- b. Adjacent Uses: Consider the potential for adjacent uses or future uses that could front onto the spaces, activate them, leverage value from them and provide potential revenue sources to help fund their implementation.
- c. Visibility: Plan for visibility into and out of the public space.
- d. Resiliency: Utilize resilient materials and design approaches and seek opportunities to make these visible and educational.
- e. Open Space Network: Consider the role of the public spaces in and potential connections to an overall open space network that includes a series of interconnected public outdoor spaces, parks and open areas with a hierarchy of sidewalks and paths.
- f. Accessibility: Ensure that parks and open spaces include amenities that are appealing and accessible to all ages and abilities and are ADA-compliant.
- g. Public Amenities: Incorporate public amenities and user comforts into or near existing and new park spaces to make the spaces attractive and functional to a wide group of users. Consider seating, particularly movable chairs and tables, bicycle

accommodations, wayfinding signage, water features, shade (trees and shade structures) and public restrooms.

h. Restaurant Partnerships: Explore partnerships with nearby restaurants to provide opportunities for outdoor dining and the provision of food and drink, an important component of successful urban open spaces.

i. Pop-Up Spaces /Multi-Use Design: Utilize “pop-up” or temporary public spaces to activate an area during a specific time of day, days of the week or seasonally. These could occur in place of a parking space, multiple spaces or an entire parking area. Explore how new or reorganized parking lots can be designed to function as parking resources most of the time and public gathering spaces some of the time.

j. Demonstration Projects: Consider opportunities to incorporate demonstration projects as part of the public realm design, such as that described in Policy 3.6.

k. Naming: Elevate the importance of public spaces by naming those not yet named and including them on wayfinding maps and directories, regardless of how small they are.

1.7 includes some of the following implementing actions:

Phase-in the establishment of an inter-connected “green cultural trail” for residents and visitors to experience Ellicott City through a connected trail network extending from the Patapsco River to the tributaries’ headwaters.

Implementing Actions

- a. Historic and Cultural Resources: Connect historic and cultural resources (physically and programmatically) to allow for a broader understanding.
- b. Main Street Connections: Consider appropriate design treatments and signage for areas where the trail intersects with and crosses Main Street and for areas where it coincides with Main Street when it is not possible to create a separate trail.
- c. Open Spaces: Link existing and potential open spaces, both active and passive.