

September 14, 2023

Chair Artie Harris and
Members of the Montgomery County Planning Board
2425 Reddie Drive, 14th Floor
Wheaton, MD 20902

Re: Testimony on Takoma Park Minor Master Plan Amendment Public Hearing
Washington Adventist University

Dear Chair Harris and Members of the Planning Board,

I am Dr. Weymouth Spence, the President of Washington Adventist University, and I wish to thank the City of Takoma Park, the Planning Board and its staff for their willingness to re-imagine what the growth areas of Takoma Park may become through the pending Takoma Park Minor Master Plan Amendment. Our approximately 24.8-acre University is one of the potential growth areas in the Plan and we welcome the opportunities that the Public Hearing Draft presents to us.

The University is bounded by Maple Avenue, Flower Avenue, Carroll Avenue, and the former Washington Adventist Hospital site. We have been in Takoma Park since 1904 and I have been president since 2008. The University is owned by the Seventh-day Adventist Church and offers a quality education to students of different faiths from around the world. There are currently a little under 600 students enrolled, with our highest ever enrollment of 498 in our undergraduate and graduate programs. During my tenure, I have put together a leadership team that elevated and transformed the former Columbia Union College to university status and is continuing to build on the legacy of former presidents to elevate the University's standing to one of international distinction. This is the right time and the right team for the University to capitalize on the opportunities that the Minor Master Plan Amendment presents.

When the Amendment was first introduced, the University partnered with our long-time affiliate, Adventist HealthCare, that controls the 17.4-acre former Washington Adventist Hospital campus to the west of the University. Together we wanted to envision how our combined portion of the Minor Master Plan area could grow to address current and future University needs. We also understood that the combined campus could help address areawide housing, recreation and connectivity opportunities if the Plan were done correctly.

I am pleased that Public Hearing Draft has recognized the need to rezone our University property and the former Washington Adventist Hospital property to a more flexible zone that also respects the built environment outside of the campus. Under its current zoning, the University must

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comparison to other similarly sized universities. The CR zoning recommended in the Public Hearing Draft provides the critical flexibility for the University to grow as needs and funding will allow. The zoning further accommodates some creative housing and connectivity opportunities that could certainly invigorate the area. These changes present transformational opportunities for the University to ensure it may continue to support and attract students for many more decades at the current location.

We also look forward to discussing other recommendations in the Public Hearing Draft that are currently unclear or may not align with our future vision. These matters include the proposed study to designate the University as a National Historic District. We also have concerns about the “Green Promenade” recommended along Maplewood Avenue and into the campus. The limited right of way and grade challenges associated with these improvements should be reviewed closely to ensure a realistic outcome for this aspirational vision. We are interested in how the proposed pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure will coordinate with our campus plans and have concerns about the blanket call for adaptive reuse of campus buildings.

As such, we look forward to staying engaged as the Minor Master Plan evolves and look forward to working with the City, the Planning Board and Planning Staff to ensure that the Plan may accommodate the positive changes that are envisioned for Takoma Park.

Thank you for your consideration of our comments.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Weymouth Spence", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Weymouth Spence, Ed.D., RT.
President
Washington Adventist University