

Sandy Spring Civic Association
Ross Body Community Center, Sandy Spring, MD 20860
(Meeting in Person and Virtually by Zoom)

June 10, 2024, Meeting

Attendance:

Board Members – Dr. Daryl Thorne, President; Basile “Whit” Whitaker, Vice President; Christine Hill Wilson, Treasurer; Douglas Farquhar, Recording and Correspondence Secretary (online); Bill Thomas, Parliamentarian (online)

Other SSCA members – approximately 13

Guests: Council Member Dawn Luedtke, and her Chief of Staff Aaron Kraut

Attendance Total (approximate): 19

Meeting called to order: 6:35 PM

The meeting began with a brief presentation by Kim Bryant, the Director of the Ross Boddy Center. She mentioned several upcoming events at the Center, and then said that the Montgomery County Recreation Department had allocated funds to “revamp” the Center’s playground. She is interested in hearing input from local residents about what features they would like to see in the playground. Someone asked whether the playground could be transformed so it would be fun for adults as well as kids. Another suggested reaching out to families with children in the Sandy Spring Orchards subdivision on Brooke Road.

At 6:47, our regular meeting began. The minutes from the May 2024 meeting were approved. Christine presented the Treasurer’s Report. Kristen Prophet on behalf of the Transportation Committee said that Brooke Road had been resurfaced at the intersection with Route 108. Someone complained about bushes needing to be trimmed on Brooke Road near Route 108.

On behalf of the Ashton Village Implementation Advisory Committee, Nadine Mort said the committee is looking for new members. At a meeting in May, the Committee heard reports about plans to improve traffic safety, and we learned that the State Highway Administration has a design for Route 108 that has been budgeted and approved. She said that the Committee also discussed the Korean Mission Church complex proposed for Route 108 on the approach to the Patuxent River. She said that the sponsors of the development had sent some updated designs, and that the lead planner is John Casey with the Maryland National Capital Park and Planning Commission.

We turned to a discussion about the Korean Mission Church development. Some nearby residents, Cheri Demoss and Mary McCarthy, said that the proposal was for a senior center of 8,000 square feet over four levels, at least three of which are above the level of the street. They said the design looks like an office building, with a sanctuary designed to accommodate 200 people, and that the site has parking for 125 attendees and 20 fulltime staff. The attendees would be bussed from all over the county on 14 vans. Residents noted that there had been some serious traffic accidents nearby on Route 108, and that the plan did not seem consistent with the Rural Cluster zone in which the land sits. They also complained that, at the County’s May 23, 2024, Design Review Committee meeting, there was no insistence on acceleration and deceleration lanes for the entrance to the center, which the residents felt increased the likelihood of accidents.

We were told that a public hearing on the proposal was originally scheduled for July 25, but that hearing had been postponed because the Church would be submitting revised plans.

A neighbor named Heidi said that she was very concerned about the proposed Center because it would not be supplied with municipal water, and that her well had run dry, and that she was concerned that the Center would deplete the aquifer even further.

A motion was passed unanimously that the SSCA should express profound concerns about the proposed Center in a written submission to the public hearing if it were to be scheduled before the SSCA meeting in September. (It turned out that the hearing was not held before the September meeting, so no letter was drafted.)

Dawn Luedtke then stated that she mostly wanted to attend the meeting to field questions and learn about community concerns. She said one thing she has been asked about is the availability of charging stations for electric vehicles at Kiss N Ride parking lots at Metro stations and at commercial shopping sites. She noted that the County doesn't run the Kiss N Ride lots, so there is little that the County Council could do.

Asked if she could weigh in on the Korean Mission Church, she noted that it was not a zoning change that would require County Council approval, so she had little role to play, as a County Council member. Aaron mentioned that he would call Heidi to see if Dawn's office could help on her well issues.

The discussion turned to complaints about the former Aunt Hattie's Place property located on Norwood Road near its intersection with Route 108. Several nearby neighbors complained about the noisy, disruptive, and secretive behavior at the site. When neighbors went to the front door to complain, those inside the building wouldn't answer the door and tried to act like nobody was there. The County Police and Permitting Departments have been notified, and have noted that the property is only supposed to be used as an educational facility. Aaron followed up after our meeting with several emails about actions the County is taking to shut down what appears to be illegal use of the property as a group home, with no educational purposes.

Dawn addressed several other issues that face the Council. She noted that the Montgomery County Public School system budget is very controversial, because the County simply cannot afford to provide funding to replace all the funding that was provided by the federal government during and after COVID. She also mentioned that she and other Council Members will sponsor a Zoning Text Amendment that will permit camping on farms of more than 25 acres in Agricultural Reserve zones, but only where farming is being performed.

The meeting adjourned at 8:08 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Doug Farquhar, Recording and Correspondence Secretary