

Evaluation of Revised Towne Crest Apartments Redevelopment Proposal  
Washington Grove Planning Commission  
June 6, 2012

The Washington Grove Planning Commission has evaluated a revised proposal for redeveloping the Towne Crest Apartments with Planned Development zoning and expansion from 107 to 356 rental units. This evaluation is based on a meeting between Towne Crest and Washington Grove representatives held May 16, 2012, with one revised concept diagram. Revised detailed plans have not been provided. As compared to the earlier proposal, the Planning Commission notes several improvements, but substantial concerns remain regarding community compatibility and negative impacts on adjacent properties within the Town of Washington Grove. The Planning Commission makes the following conclusions regarding the revised proposal:

**1. The proposed redevelopment is not compatible with neighboring areas and the larger community.**

The revision is noted to locate townhouses on the portion of the Towne Crest property nearest to Washington Grove Lane. This is an improvement to increase compatibility with the existing adjacent and nearby single family homes. However, the townhouse locations as presented still violate the required 100-foot setback from the adjacent single family homes along Daylily Lane. The corner of proposed "Building B" also appears to violate this 100-foot setback requirement.

The overall proposed density (44 units per acre) and proposed building sizes (3 and 4-story) are not consistent with compatibility requirements specified in the Montgomery County Zoning Ordinance. The adjacent single-family residential areas are zoned and developed with 6 units per acre. The adjacent multi-family residential areas are zoned and developed with 12.5 units per acre. All neighboring residential areas are developed with maximum 2-story residential structures, therefore the proposed building heights are not compatible with neighboring residential areas.

The proposed density is not supported by proximity to transit or transportation policy. The Towne Crest property is located within the Montgomery Village/Airpark Policy Area, not one of the 10 policy areas in the County designated "Metro station policy areas" – communities generally within a half-mile radius of a Metro station. The Towne Crest property is 3 miles by automobile or more than 12 minutes by bus from the Shady Grove Metro Station; therefore the Towne Crest property does not qualify for transit-oriented development. The property's proximity to Washington Grove MARC Station (0.6 miles) does not qualify as transit-oriented development. Applicable growth policy and transportation review guidelines for the Towne Crest property are "Suburban", not "Urban", and do not support the proposed redevelopment as a transit-oriented development.

**2. The proposed redevelopment would cause the loss of significant trees.**

The proposed redevelopment would cause the loss of a significant number of trees and would violate County forest conservation requirements. The Forest Conservation Plan identifies a total of 72 significant or specimen trees; 13 on Towne Crest property and 59 in the Washington Grove West Woods. The proposed development would result in critical root zone impacts and the loss of all but one of these trees on the Towne Crest property and many others in the West Woods. Other trees in the West Woods would suffer irreparable harm. The proposed afforestation is not adequate; street trees (20 years hence) over public property cannot meet requirements of the Montgomery County Forest Conservation Law.

The proposed proximity of the access roads along the border with the West Woods, with substantial grading and a retaining wall, will cut or damage many tree roots. Grading must not be allowed near or in the West Woods. These access roads adjacent to the West Woods will also enable continued damage to the Woods caused by dumping of household and noxious vehicle-related trash. A design change is needed to provide for entrance to the proposed parking structures from the sides, rather than the rear.

Towne Crest developer representatives have acknowledged a legacy responsibility to address the existing and foreseen Towne Crest storm water harmful impacts on the West Woods. A significant number of trees in the Town's West Woods have been lost due to severe erosion caused by storm water outfalls from the Towne Crest community. Recent County modifications to fencing and added riprap for the largest storm water outfall from Towne Crest have improved, but not stopped, the flow of trash and the erosion into the West Woods. Proposed on-site storm water bio-treatment does not include holding capacity; real-time outflow from the redeveloped Towne Crest Apartments will continue to cause erosion in the West Woods. A proposal to pipe the smaller outfall from Towne Crest under Daylily Lane and into the West Woods may be helpful. A proposal to split the largest outfall into two separated and lower outfalls may slightly reduce initial outfall velocity, and will not reduce the concentrated flow and downstream erosion in the West Woods. The Town and the County have renewed collaboration to improve management of this intrusive flow from Towne Crest, and remedial restoration activities have been identified and begun on a limited basis involving Boy Scouts and Town volunteers. Towne Crest developer contributions to accelerate such remedial action would be helpful.

### **3. The proposed redevelopment is not compatible with the adjacent significant historic resource.**

The Town of Washington Grove as a whole, rather than its individual historic properties, is listed on the National Register of Historic Places and is known as "the town within a forest." The unique sense of place for which the Town is recognized arises from a blend of its unique rural setting, its historic legacy, and community life. That fabric becomes more vulnerable when juxtaposed to starkly incompatible land use like the redevelopment proposed for Towne Crest. The unit density, height, lot coverage density, and almost all the features of the proposal are incompatible with the forested setting, low density, low profile structures, and nearby quiet presence of the historic resource.

### **4. The proposed redevelopment should assist with pedestrian access impacts on the West Woods.**

The chain link fence along the Towne Crest/West Woods border gets cut frequently from the Towne Crest side, and the resulting uncontrolled access and associated trash (including the dumping of car oil) have made maintenance of the West Woods an ongoing challenge and burden for the Town. The West Woods are for public use and enjoyment, and more effective channeling of the pedestrian traffic will improve maintenance and protect the character of the West Woods. Nearby installations of fences near Fairhaven Drive, and also along the Towne Crest property border with the Saybrooke community, have demonstrated effective pedestrian traffic control. A new fence is needed (with design to be approved by the Town) along the entire border of the Towne Crest property with the West Woods to ensure access to the West Woods via existing maintained foot paths connecting Washington Grove Lane and Kelley Park.