



David J. Caporale, President
William R. Atkinson, Commissioner
Creade V. Brodie, Jr., Commissioner
Jason M. Bennett, CPA, Administrator
T. Lee Beeman, Esq, Attorney

November 2, 2023

Westside Neighborhood Association

Cumberland, MD 21502

Thank you for taking the time to lay out your concerns to us in such a detailed manner. We write in response today to address many of your concerns, although, not all of them are able to be addressed at this point in time.

We truly do appreciate your interest in the redevelopment of the Old Allegany High School site. As we are sure you understand, this is a once-in-a-generation opportunity for the housing market in our County. We face a lack of housing in the new/higher quality market, which translates to various issues in the economic climate here. Through our workings with local businesses, top employers, and real estate professionals, we are told time and time again that they are unable to attract and retain talent due to the lack of available, acceptable housing options. In order to attract and retain business and grow our workforce, this is an issue we must urgently remedy and we do not take the task lightly.

This project has the ability to kickstart growth and redevelopment of our housing supply. We are thrilled with the progress that has been made so far, and feel very good about the direction the project is heading. While we understand that your association would have preferred moving forward with a different developer, there is much to celebrate here. It is our hope that you are willing to remain supportive of this project as a whole, citing the impact it will have on our County and region.

In an effort to answer some of your questions, we have compiled information below. This project is still in its infancy. The Allegany County Economic Development team requested RFPs for this specific plot of land, and the only firm decision that has been made thus far is to work with DR Horton. The finality of the site plan, number of units, costs, revenues, and so on are still being discussed and collaborated on.

In choosing the developer to work with, our review panel used a metric system to grade proposals as follows: Projected Cost per Unit (20%), Time to Market (20%), Amenities & Marketability (20%), Unit Density for Housing type (10%), Opportunity for Intergenerational Living (10%), Proven Ability to Finance and Complete Projects (10%), and Firm Experience and Portfolio (10%.) DR Horton outscored the other applicants with a 10% margin. The review panel was unanimous in their scoring of both proposals, and the County Commissioners held final approval of the developer selection. We are aware of the articles and stats that you have mentioned in your letter, letter to the editor, and when addressing us at a public business meeting. Additionally, we are aware of thousands of other experiences that were positive. We understand that any large-scale company will have complaints. In this specific case, we feel that any risk to the suggested issues will be mitigated through a strict building permit and inspection process.

DR Horton has been a pleasure to work with and has demonstrated a desire to positively impact the housing market in our County by working as partners in this process. As the nation's largest home builder, they understand the challenges we face. The costs for new construction are high, no matter where you are building. The units they will build here in Allegany County will cost the same to build as those in Montgomery County, for example. They understand, however, that the sale price cannot be the same. By the County proposing to cover the site work prior to construction and incurring no cost for the land, this allows them to decrease their sale price so that the project is profitable for them and within reason to the buyers interested in this type of property in Allegany County.

Projected sale prices may range anywhere from \$199,000 to the mid \$300,000's, depending on the type of unit. Our local Realtor Association has assured us that not only will these units sell at those prices, but they will sell quickly. Between local families and couples looking to move into new construction and families from outside the area looking for high quality homes, they are constantly being asked for homes that fit this mold. It's important to note that this housing project is to develop a type of housing stock that we are lacking; new construction with high end finishes. These prices are not going to be comparable to existing homes in the neighborhood, because they will be a different type of unit. One other thing to note, is that the addition of these homes will likely increase the property value of all neighboring homes.

Considerations are still being made on the best mix of housing types. Our local realtors further affirmed the need for intergenerational housing, defined in our RFP as single-level/accessible units. With those units come a larger footprint and considerations on site density and realistic profitability overall. We are not naive to this, and again, are still working with the developer on the best plan moving forward. The site will, at minimum, include green space, sidewalks, and a playground. Additionally, we are working on plans to acquire an adjacent piece of land to develop into a park, possibly linking to the GAP Trail.

The plan is for the County to complete site work, according to a final site plan that is agreed upon by DR Horton and the County Commissioners. The County will retain ownership of the plots of land during construction. Upon the sale of each home, the County will relinquish the lot to new owners, and DR Horton will keep the profits for all sales. DR Horton will never own the land, nor have the opportunity to sell land to other builders. There has been no request by us for DR Horton to share profits. We have asked them to pass on those savings to future homeowners by way of sale price. The City will maintain the streets, as the project is within City limits, and the intent is to establish an HOA to cover maintenance fees and management for common space.

The DR Horton plan is likely not to include a community center in the interest of housing density. We believe the space to be better utilized to create single-level living spaces. It's important to note that in the proposal comparison metric scoring, even without the community center included in the plan, DR Horton still finished on top.

As noted in the past few public business meetings, Live Together presented a beautiful proposal. Based on the timeline needed for this project, they were unable (financially) to complete this project in one fell-swoop. On this specific plot of land, it is a priority of the County to move as fast as possible to get housing built and available. Their timeline did not fit the intent for this specific project. We remain in contact with them to find an area of land that better suits their plan.

The concern of your association and neighborhood residents has been noted. It is our intent to ensure that quality construction is top priority, and the site remains an enjoyable and easy place to walk, exercise, and view. Beyond that, respectfully, the site plan and construction will be left to professionals who spend their daily careers in this industry. That includes local professionals in real estate and construction. At intermittent points in the planning process, we will continue to consult with these groups for their professional opinions.

Again, many of the final details are still being finalized, and we look forward to sharing that information with you as the time comes.

Respectfully,



Jason M. Bennett, CPA
County Administrator

701 Kelly Road
Cumberland, MD 21502
E countyclerk@alleganygov.org
T 301 777-5911
alleganygov.org