

OLD GOUCHE in charles village



Urban Design & Architectural Review Panel
Baltimore City Department of Planning
417 E. Fayette Street, 8th Floor
Baltimore, MD 21202

Attention: Anthony Cataldo

October 30, 2013

Dear Mr. Cataldo & the Review Panel:

Please accept this statement on behalf of the Old Goucher Community Association and the Old Goucher Business Alliance regarding the most recent 25th Street Station design revisions.

While we applaud the modest steps that the designers of the project have taken to improve the design, the most important underlying flaws have yet to be addressed. We have detailed these issues at length in previous letters (which we have included again for your convenience). While there have been a number of cosmetic changes since the first UDARP hearing, these revisions have been mostly inadequate in fixing design issues related to pedestrian accessibility, urbanism, ingress and egress, and historical preservation.

We strongly urge the architects to consider repositioning of the Walmart building within the site (such as elevating the structure so that the main entrance is at 25th Street level (with parking below). Ms. Feinberg from Planning has indicated that there is full room within the minor amendment process to revisit the site plan, and after much consideration we feel that the design is unlikely to become pedestrian-friendly or more urban without at least some reorientation of the Walmart structure.

We wish to commend the Panel for your excellent work, as you have raised most of the same concerns as our community members, and your comments have spurred some genuine improvements to the architecture. While we hope that today's revisions will address all of the underlying concerns, we urge the Panel to withhold approval until fundamental design issues (as noted on the following pages) have been resolved.

Sincerely,

Bruce Willen and Philip Lacombe
on behalf of the Old Goucher Community Association and Old Goucher Business Alliance

Jeanne Knight
President, Old Goucher Community Association

Ken Abrams
President, Old Goucher Business Alliance

Key Concerns

- Pedestrian and ADA accessibility is still inadequate for a neighborhood where 50% of residents do not drive.
- Proposed new site plan is a suburban layout that does not belong in the heart of Baltimore. It does not mesh with or enhance the urban grid of the surrounding neighborhoods.
- Major safety and pedestrian access issues caused by the proposed stairs and elevator access from both 25th and 24th Streets.
- Destruction of historic Royer's Chapel to make way for a Walmart truck loading dock is shortsighted and exemplifies regressive urban development.
- Project does not meet basic environmental standards, and does not comply with current Maryland stormwater regulations.
- The new loading dock location places refrigerated trucks in close proximity to residences, causing a greater health and noise impact
- The most recent rounds of design revisions make some steps in the right direction, but they are mainly cosmetic improvements that do not attempt to address these larger, underlying flaws in the proposed redesign.

Recommendations

- The architects and engineers should strongly consider revisiting the site plan to improve pedestrian access and urban integration:
 - Creating an entrance to Walmart that faces 25th Street and Huntingdon at street level is critical. Most pedestrians will be entering the site on foot from the north and northeast.
 - Consider moving the Walmart building so that it isn't surrounded on three sides by parking lots. At least one side of the building could integrate with the streets and setbacks on 24th or 25th Streets.
- A two-story Walmart or a single story structure with parking below would be a better use of the site's topography and allow for an entrance at 25th Street level.
- The Walmart entrance must be easier to access for pedestrians and those with mobility issues:
 - The main access points from both 25th and 24th Street entrances should be replaced by or augmented with ADA accessible ramps if the building remains at 24th Street level.
 - Create an adequate alternative to the outdoor elevator proposed at the east corner of the store, for when the elevator breaks or is unavailable.
- The proposed elevator should take riders directly into the Walmart lobby to improve safety and create a more welcoming environment.
- Move the main 24th Street car entrance back to its original location near Huntingdon Avenue.
- Create an additional vehicular entrance from Sisson Street, north of Royer's Chapel, to divert traffic from I-83 and Hampden away from residences on 24th Street.
- Truck loading area should be moved away from residences on 24th Street.
 - At minimum, the loading area should be moved behind the Walmart (between the building and the railroad tracks) or restored to its original location at the north corner of the building.
 - Repositioning the Walmart building on the site would allow for even better locations with improved truck access, such as the easternmost portion of the site next to the self-storage building.
- Consider ways to improve the street edge along 25th and Huntingdon.
- Historic Royer's Chapel should be preserved for adaptive reuse
- This project is billed as a "green" development. It should meet or exceed current Maryland stormwater standards.

Recommendations that have yet to be addressed (from October 10, 2013)

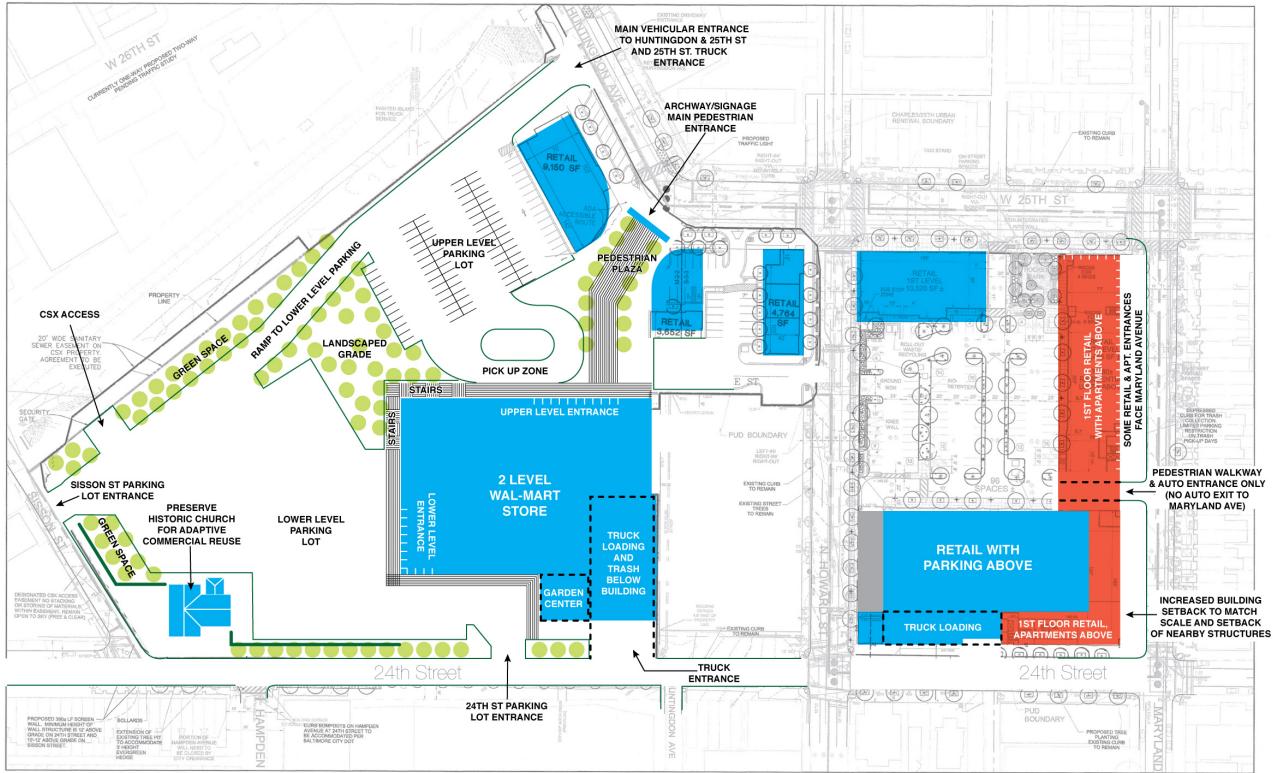
Based on community feedback, we recommend specific design changes that will help address neighborhood concerns and will improve the project's design:

- **The design must be more urban** and reflect the scale and quality of architecture in Old Goucher.
- **We request a high quality architectural design** that is welcoming, attractive, and fits in better with the great architecture in our neighborhood. As an example, we have included designs of new Walmart stores in Washington DC designed by *these very same architects*.
- **A two-story Walmart store** (or a single-story store with parking below or above) would be a more urban design approach. The idea of a multi-level building was received very favorably by Old Goucher and Remington residents.
- **The revised designs should actively engage the street, neighborhood, and pedestrians.** These are neighborhoods of walkers, and a car-centric design only serves half of the shoppers of this complex.
- **A reorientation of the Walmart building and entrances** could make the building easier to access for pedestrians, most of whom will be coming from 25th Street. Pedestrians should not be forced to walk through a large parking lot or down a long, ugly, and uninviting path and staircase. (see Resident-Friendly Site plan)
- **Improve pedestrian safety and experience** by placing access points closer to the neighborhood and having short, protected, and attractive walkways between the street and all building entrances.
- **Move vehicular entrances away from the historic Fawcett neighborhood.** 24th St. entrance should be further east. Add a Sisson St. entrance so that Sisson St. traffic can access site without driving through Fawcett.
- **Remove vehicular entrance and intersection at 25th and Huntingdon** to reduce traffic congestion and create more inviting street edge and pedestrian entrance. Move this vehicular entrance and intersection to north edge of project on Huntingdon. (see Resident-Friendly Site plan)
- **Create a stronger street edge at 25th Street** for better neighborhood integration. Changing the 25th and Huntingdon intersection to a pedestrian entrance would also allow for a built entrance at this location (archway, signage, etc)
- **Move truck loading areas and truck entrances** as far away as possible from residents on 24th Street. Reorienting the Walmart building could allow for loading areas in the southeast corner of the site.
- **Preserve the historic Royers Chapel at 24th and Sisson** for adaptive reuse. The project is 55% smaller, so there is certainly no reason to destroy the chapel for a parking lot. Could be converted into offices, a restaurant, or even a Walmart garden center.
- **Additional green space** should be added throughout the site. The reduction in project size would allow for ample greening and landscaping.
- **Landscaping water and sprinkler access** should be incorporated so that trees and greenery will be properly cared for throughout the project. We recommend that a tree maintenance plan be adopted before final approval of the project.

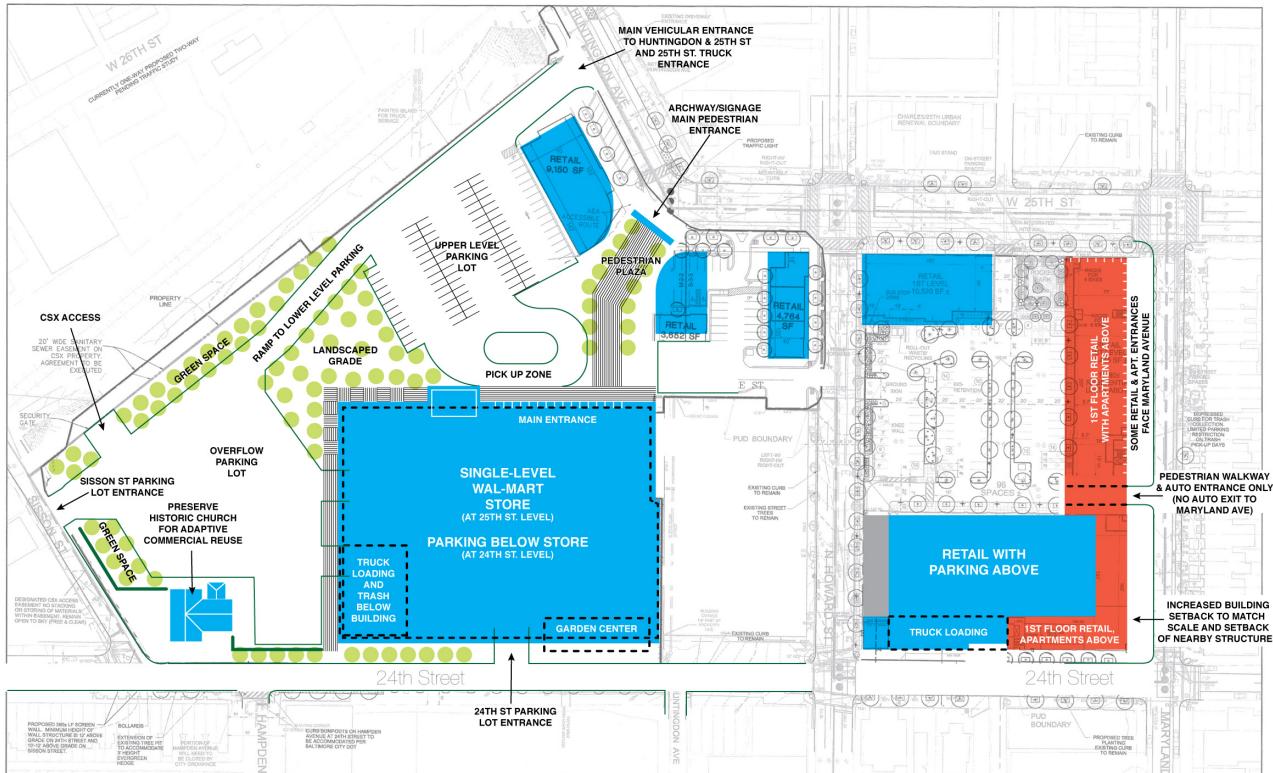
Example Resident-Friendly Site Plans

These sketches for revised site plans are a quick exercise, demonstrating that resident's priorities and the developer's original promised could be accommodated with a little bit of creativity.

25th Street Station, Resident-Friendly Site Plan 2



25th Street Station, Resident-Friendly Site Plan 1



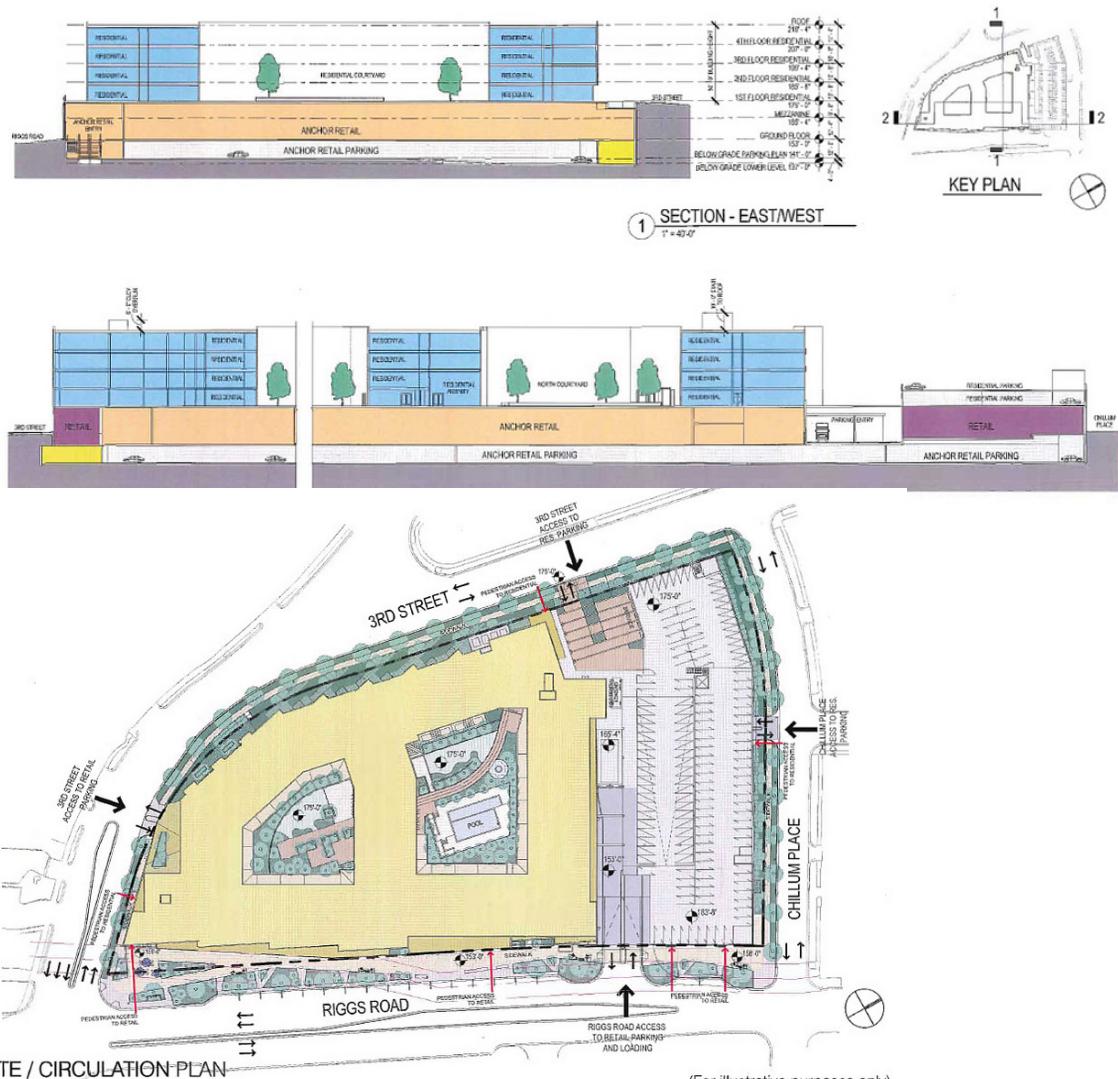
New Washington, DC Walmarts designed by MMA Architects

The new Walmarts in DC all are significantly better designs than the proposed 25th Street Station Walmart. The Georgia Ave. and Fort Totten sites are most demographically and geographically similar to our neighborhoods. We present these renderings to show that *Walmart and this architect are capable of doing much better. Why are they not doing so in Baltimore?*

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_1dUf2Sa6dY



<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QcA3ujCO0rM>



Skyland Town Center



<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jGTCn9drhVE>

1st & H St (Gonzaga)



Resident Comments & Feedback

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I am writing to express my opposition to the design currently on the table for the Walmart portion of 25th Street Station. Looking at the plans presented on October 10th, I can see that a few gestures have been made toward what the community wants—a few extra trees, and a less foreboding façade. However, they are far from sufficient. The basic fact remains that this is a development designed first and foremost for cars.

To be appropriate for its location, and to be of maximum benefit for the community, this development should be designed for pedestrians. Many in this area cannot afford to own cars, and many who can choose not to. Today it is backward-looking to build foremost for cars in the middle of the city. While my personal preference would be that something other than a Walmart be built in this area, I am willing to support the development if it is designed well, for the people who live here. As it stands, this is plainly not the case. Pedestrians should not have to cross an oceanic parking lot to enter the store--rather, cars should have to tuck themselves away, out of sight from the main entrance. Is that impossible in this space?

Walmart is trying to sell us a tired, cheap design. We as a neighborhood deserve better; we as a city deserve better. Please help to push the Department of Planning to demand better for us!

John David Evans
2244 Guilford Ave

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I don't have much to say that hasn't already been said but I basically agree with a lot of it: I live on 25th and Howard and aside from the unpleasant look I simply don't see myself crossing the parking lot to shop there. **These type of designs create mental barriers in how people perceive them and this design sends the message that despite what we've been told, this shopping center is not for the neighborhoods.** The walls are going to create unsafe-feeling areas that I will avoid walking by.

I think that they try to feed us ideas of landscaping.. trees, planter boxes (aka glorified trash cans) but when put in reality the things look quite different once subjected to the elements and the litterbugs and the vehicle damage that will inevitably come. **Trees enhance Old Goucher because we have beautiful architecture and we have good neighbors to maintain them and keep trash in check. But they won't have the same impact when the thing they're gilding is unsightly in the first place.**

Kara MH

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It doesn't seem like the same project they got approval for a few years ago.

Chris Brooks

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After attending last week's UDARP meeting on the proposed revisions to the 25th Street Station plan, I was very dismayed. **This development is a chance for central Baltimore to move forward, but low density car-centric development like this is is sadly backward-looking. This is a densely populated area, and new developments here should be oriented to pedestrians and cyclists.**

There is an irony in the fact that this project is justified in part by Wal-Mart's ability to meet the shopping needs of our low income neighbors, but yet the proposal is to build it in a way that alienates anyone not arriving in a car--ie, our low income neighbors.

John David Evans

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Better quality architecture will result in higher income for this developer so I'm not sure why they wouldn't want to put forth some effort. More importantly to me, a large development can assist in this neighborhood's renaissance, increasing the tax base, beautifying the streets and improving the quality of life. Or a large development, like the shopping center at Maryland and 21st, can attract crime, struggle to attract tenants, be a blight in the neighborhood, and prevent the neighborhood from flourishing.

Sarah Templin

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My thought when Walmart said they were putting the garden center on that side was to save and renovate and make [Royers Chapel] part of the garden center. How cool would it be to go into the stone building to get your plants and accessories. Sort of like Valley View Farms Nursery. Much classier than your normal walmart.

Betsy Anthony-Childs

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the process shouldn't only weigh the changes to the plan itself as if this development existed in a vacuum, but should also take into account the context in which it fits.

even if no revisions were being made to the plan itself, 3 and a half years have passed and major demographic trends, for our neighborhood, for our city, and for american cities at large have made themselves more apparent during that time. people are moving back to cities across the nation, and they are seeking out dense, walkable, urban areas. baltimore itself saw a small net gain in population last year for the first time in decades. the station north arts district is blossoming and there is talk of enlarging its borders such that it abuts this project directly. seawall is blazing a trail of walkable, human-scaled redevelopment in remington. people are driving less in general, and more people are eschewing car ownership entirely, even those who are not forced to for economic reasons. improvements to alternative transportation options in the immediate vicinity are in the pipeline for the short term (circulator expansion, real-time bus arrival info, bikeshare, maryland avenue cycletrack) as well as for a more theoretical long term (charles street trolley or some other rail transportation on the charles street corridor, MARC service on the CSX belt line) that will partially obviate the need for so much parking and such an automobile-focused layout.

at this point in history, it seems to me that it is in the city's best interests to discourage the type of development design we've been fed here without the community even having to put up this kind of fight, if we want to continue to build on the progress we've been making and catch up with a washington, dc that is now larger than baltimore for the first time in history and can get high quality development like the plans phillip showed for georgia avenue.

Christopher Nelson

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Originally, this is what was stated about this project (<http://www.25thstreetstation.com/TheProject.html>):

Urban Design Approach

The project's overarching design principle is to create an urban mixed-use complex that is compatible with the scale and character of the surrounding neighborhoods and takes advantage of the unusual topography of the site, permitting multi-level construction. The development will utilize sustainable design principles creating a pedestrian friendly, lively environment for the community.

The proposed doesn't seem compatible with the scale and character of the surrounding neighborhood nor does it seem to do anything to create a pedestrian friendly lively environment for the community....quite the opposite in my opinion. Looks like any other suburban development.

It's a shame that this type of development is going into/near an historic neighborhood that is experiencing a renaissance. Other development IS happening here and IT is in keeping with our character. It is not an impossible task.

I'm not sure that writing to you has any impact at all but am doing so in the hopes that I am wrong on this count. I am not an urban planner nor do I have any credentials in the field, I only know what I see and this project looks terrible and will not only NOT be beneficial to our neighborhood but will be detrimental.

Thank you for your attention. Let me know if there is ANY way that I can affect how this project moves forward.

Kris Northrup

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We are excited by the arrival in the past three years of new residents and businesses, who could have chosen other neighborhoods. And we are worried that a quick build of a substandard Walmart, at the lowest end of any design standards, will reverse our forward momentum.

The proposed changes are problematic on many fronts and they aren't minor. Changing entrances, exits, traffic flow and truck routes is not minor. Changing the square footage and number of parking spaces up OR down is not minor. These are not superficial changes. They are major ones. Major enough to damage our neighborhood. Major enough to make the City look bad for allowing it to happen when it doesn't have to.

The City will get its Walmart. And the developer and Walmart will make their money. They are not going to leave the project if these proposed changes are deemed a Major Amendment. If a delay in their schedule was that detrimental to them, they would have already abandoned the project. But, they are still here.

This is an opportunity for all of us to make the project more successful, than it will be if these proposed changes are allowed to be rammed through as a Minor Amendment. Washington, D.C. has pushed developers and Walmart for better, more appropriately urban developments and it has gotten them. Why wouldn't Baltimore do the same?

Cathy Yates

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With big box retailers poised to continue expanding their operations into city centers, even as cities gain in population and development due to the urban qualities that are increasingly attracting new residents of all demographics and generations, **there is a fantastic opportunity for cities like ours to show how this type of center can be adapted to reflect the qualities that make cities like Baltimore special places to live.**

With proper design and collaboration, this center could be a iconic success for the developer, a major milestone for a large retailer like Walmart, a boon to the city and an asset for the surrounding neighborhoods and communities. It could be the type of project that catalyzes growth throughout the area and becomes an example for other cities about what can be accomplished when communities, corporations and developers work together for the benefit of all.

Or it could be the opposite of that. A detriment to a vital area of the city. A costly failure for the retailer. A black eye for the development team. And a source of ongoing embarrassment for the city and the current administration.

A little time can make a lot of difference. With what is at stake, the desire to revisit the project as a major amendment to the PUD is a modest proposal to make for the benefit all parties involved. Lets not squander this opportunity.

Jay Orr
ARQ Architects
Old Goucher Business Alliance

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** We reiterate here the lack of time given to compile community input. We expect that many more residents would contribute with a proper comments period.*