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Comments: Town of Poolesville Master Plan Draft September 15, 2011 - Prepared by Caroline Taylor on behalf of Montgomery Countryside Alliance

There is much to applaud in the current draft Master Plan for Poolesville. The addition, for example, of language supporting the school cluster is of particular importance. Formal recognition from the Board of Education and County of our cluster as a rural school district will be necessary to ensure our schools' vitality and, indeed, existence. Overall, language that supports retaining the rural nature of the Town is beneficial and responsive to the various, and most recent, surveys of Town residents which make clear that the vast majority desire that the Town maintain its small, rural character.

There are several areas that deserve comment with an eye towards refinement that may provide greater protection for the Town's natural resources and rural identity. Take note of this threshold question: *How many residents are there currently in the Town?* The Master Plan Draft states that the population is currently 5200, while we understand that Census figures put that number below 5000. This is an important question as the Plan anticipates growth to 6500. It has bearing, most particularly, on how well the groundwater aquifer can support the anticipated growth.

Groundwater: There is simply no way to overstate this: the Town has a central obligation to its residents, and indeed the greater community, to ensure that development does not exceed the carrying capacity of our sole source aquifer. Our recent request for well monitoring data from the Town Manager has not yet been fulfilled and thus we are unable to provide specifics as to how area wells have fared since, in 2007, a number of private wells south of Town went dry, necessitating the drilling of deeper wells. Climate data indicates that (despite the high volume water events of recent past) August is becoming an increasing dry month in this region. In fact, climate scientists point to increased drought cycles in this region. This is noted not with a mind to alarm but rather to encourage the Town to make careful study of groundwater use and recharge and adjust population projections as necessary. It would be unfortunate to provide a green light for development projects ahead of knowing what the aquifer will actually support. Note that a least one yet online well, *Rabinales*, does not provide additional water but simply draws down both Wells 9 and 10. This type of interaction between wells should be carefully studied so that the Town does not overestimate the capacity of their well system. Language should be inserted in response to this concern.

Transportation: Reference to the roadways outside the Town's boundaries suggests that Town lobbying efforts should be engaged to encourage altering/widening certain, though unspecified, roadways. It would be prudent to coordinate any such efforts with affected communities, County advisory groups and civic groups. While widening roadways may be desirable to some, in terms of allowing for increased vehicular speed for commuting, the increased speed will present danger and conflict to roadway users

and residences. Public education in Town newsletters etc. regarding the need to exercise care on rural roads that carry large farm equipment, bike riders, pedestrians, wildlife and provide access to across road mail boxes would be most helpful. Moreover, the Town could advocate for routine speed checks in trouble spots outside its boundaries. A number of studies strongly refute the hypothesis that infrastructure improvements have been effective at reducing total fatalities and injuries. Wider roads, State and County data demonstrate, do not promote safety – they promote speed. Line of sight issues, however, present clear hazard and should be given priority, notably the intersection of Partnership and Sugarland Roads. Any improvements to rural roadways should employ context sensitive design solutions. Language addressing these concerns would be prudent.

The Plan and 66B:

Stream Conditions:

This [map link](#) indicates that streams directly south of Poolesville have suffered in quality. Clearly, the Town has, in the past, missed opportunities to ensure that area streams remain healthy. While the current proposed buffers to stream offer compliance with County standards, the Master Plan should state compliance with the State's new MS4 permit. Moreover, existing development adjacent to streams should be encouraged, through educational outreach and grant support, to plant buffers along stream banks where possible. The Town has eager assistance for endeavors of this sort through coordination with the Poolesville High School Global Ecology program.

Poolesville: Past is Prologue

Clearly, Western Montgomery County as a whole benefits from a vibrant business district in Poolesville. The Chamber and Commissioners should be congratulated on their work to strengthen the Town's business base and identity. From our perspective, much can be gained by capitalizing on Poolesville's unique location: in the Reserve amidst producing farms, near the River and with a foundation of history that still speaks today. All efforts at restoring historic structures, retaining low density development within the Town, enticing businesses that will attract agri-tourism, and providing services and center to what we hope will be expanding farming enterprises will yield excellent result. Washington area residents will come to Poolesville to dine, explore and shop if there is a cohesive identity established and, importantly, local residents will keep their dollars local. Efforts toward enabling historic restorations should be given priority.

And lastly, we support a community center for all ages as many will benefit from a place "at home" to gather and recreate. We truly appreciate the opportunity to comment.