

Community Input from Halethorpe Improvement Association Regarding the Proposed Southern Crossroads Development

The Halethorpe community was established 130 years ago and is comprised mostly of single-family dwellings on approximately quarter-acre lots. Many of these homes are almost as old as Halethorpe itself. The Halethorpe Improvement Association (HIA) was chartered in 1957 and is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization dedicated to preserving and enhancing the quality of life in our community. HIA does not support the proposed Southern Crossroads development in its current form as submitted to Baltimore County in its Concept Plans.

HIA respects the rights of the new owner of the former Good Shepherd property (hereinafter the property). HIA looks forward to establishing a working relationship with the new owner in which both parties may discuss concerns and devise solutions to development challenges that are mutually satisfying. HIA also looks to the developer and County to ensure all standards, laws, codes, and proper procedures are adhered to. To that end, Baltimore County has, through the Concept Plan Conference (CPC), put forth on record reports from all agencies concerned. Many shortcomings in the concept plans were addressed with each agency's report.

Qualitative analysis reveals mixed opinions about the proposed development, but common concerns also come to light. HIA, as a representative of its member-residents of Halethorpe, would like to focus its community input on six areas that the people who live here are most concerned about. While there are many more in-depth questions to be addressed, at this point in the development process HIA would like to focus on the main concerns that the community has put forth. They are:

- School overcrowding
- Increased traffic and related issues
- Stormwater management—potential problems
- Stormwater management—existing problems
- Compatibility with existing neighborhood
- Uncertainty about “Reserved for Future Use” areas on the concept plans

School Overcrowding

A brief look at Baltimore County Public Schools data for Halethorpe Elementary School (HES) for the 2019-2020 school year show HES's capacity is 392 and the student population was 365—only 27 fewer students than capacity. If only 15% of the proposed 196 townhouses have one child of elementary school age, then the school will become overcrowded.

The Department of Planning's report for the CPC states, “This development is subject to Section 32-6-103 of the Baltimore County Code, Adequate Public Facilities. A school impact analysis is required with the development plan submittal.” HIA is interested in examining this school impact analysis. This report also states that the proposed development lies within the boundaries of Arbutus Middle School and Lansdowne High School. HES is the newest of these schools that will be affected by the proposed development, built in 1976; the latter schools were built in 1958 and 1963, respectively, and both are near capacity.

Aside from the obvious in-school problems of overcrowding, “[T]he quality of schools has an impact on home sales. If it's a lower rated school (especially high school) people will avoid that area if they have children. Unfortunately, Lansdowne High School already has a low rating. It also affects home prices, for example there are homes in Arbutus which are assigned to Catonsville High School, those homes have more resale value because of it.” says realtor Jeff Choyce. If the addition of 196 townhouse results in school overcrowding, then existing property values and home sales will suffer.

With adequate planning, school overcrowding can be avoided. The new Relay Elementary School opened in 2017—the same year construction began on the Highgate Village townhouse development off of Cedar Avenue in

Relay which has 124 units. This is a good example of school infrastructure in place before the construction of a new development begins. The opposite is true for the proposed Southern Crossroads development.

Increased Traffic and Related Issues

Halethorpe is an older community that has satisfied the needs and lifestyles of its residents for scores of years. Many roads are not designed to accommodate large volumes of pedestrians and/or traffic. Most are narrow and have parked cars on them, further inhibiting the flow of traffic. Maple Avenue is especially prone to congestion at dismissal time for HES. And should there be an accident at the intersection of the proposed new road and Route 1, all traffic from the development will be going past HES and through our neighborhood.

Another concern is the fact that Maple Avenue is the only access road to the development site until the proposed new road to Route 1 is built. The volume and frequency of construction vehicles will be a nuisance for residents and a danger to pedestrians—especially school children.

Regarding pedestrians, HIA did a recent inventory of sidewalks on roads north of Ridge Avenue and south of I-95 (in the vicinity of the proposed development). HIA found the following:

- Roads with no sidewalks Summit Avenue, Fairview Avenue, Linden Avenue, Woodside Avenue, Carroll Avenue
- Roads with only partial sidewalks Maple Avenue, Ridge Avenue, Poplar Avenue, Arbutus Avenue, Potomac Avenue, Rehbaum Avenue

If the development is to proceed, Baltimore County and/or the developer needs to address these public safety issues before construction begins.

Stormwater Management—Potential Problems

One needs look no further than Ellicott City to see the danger of development on the higher elevations of a watershed. Ellicott City experienced considerable destruction from two “hundred-year floods” in 2016 and 2018. The Baltimore County Code follows the directives of the Stormwater Management Act of 2007. But, given the increased frequency of extreme weather events, this Act may be out of date.

The property occupies the highest ground in Halethorpe. The topography is irregular and has several wetlands which are out of the ordinary for a hilltop property. Increasing impervious surfaces and regrading the terrain may alter existing groundwater levels and result in runoff that could exceed the capacity of storm water management facilities. Several key points in Baltimore County’s Stormwater Management Comments from the CPC are of particular interest to HIA:

2-F Site design must maintain, to the maximum extent possible, predevelopment drainage patterns and characteristics. Diversion of drainage is discouraged and EPS reserves the right to prohibit drainage diversions it finds detrimental.

5-C All site runoff must be conveyed to a suitable outfall without adversely affecting the receiving wetland, watercourse, waterbody, storm drain or adjacent property.

5-P This project **does not** meet the Baltimore County Code Development Plan requirements at this time.

The site plans reveal significant regrading and no significant streams that could be used as a suitable outfall. William Carter, HIA Vice President, lives on First Avenue and his backyard borders the East Branch of Herbert Run which would more than likely be one of the outfalls for this proposed development. While the stream usually averages 6 to 12 inches deep, during storms he has witnessed the level of the stream get as high as 11 feet. How much more runoff can this stream accept before flooding occurs on a regular basis?

Furthermore, stormwater management facilities require regular maintenance or their effectiveness diminishes. Properties in Halethorpe have experienced flooding due to stormwater management flumes adjacent to I-95 not being regularly maintained. If the HOA of the new development is to maintain these facilities, how will they be held accountable for any lapse in maintenance and subsequent flooding of nearby property? Who will be held accountable if these facilities are overwhelmed?

Stormwater Management—Existing Problems

In addition, Otis Collins, president of Halethorpe Civic League, brought to Carter's attention the issue of flooding at the intersection of Halethorpe and Jeanne Avenues during heavy rains. He wondered where the overwhelming flow of stormwater came from, and whether the proposed development might have an impact on this flow. Checking the local USGS topographic map, Carter saw no streams that flowed from the north (the direction in which the property lies in relation to the area that concerns Collins).

To investigate, Carter and I went to the intersection mentioned above on a clear day. We did find evidence of flooding (dirt washed onto the roads and collections of debris deposited as if from floodwater). Between Halethorpe Avenue and Jeanne Avenue there is a drainage ditch that had only a few small puddles and no flowing water. We followed this ditch in a northerly direction along Jeanne Avenue and Hannah Avenue up to Washington Boulevard all the way, finding only a few puddles and no flow.

We found stormwater inlets on Washington Boulevard just south of the Royal Farms store that would outflow into this ditch. We crossed Washington Boulevard, went behind the Royal Farms store, and saw a stormwater inlet, which led us to the stormwater inlets on Ridge Avenue. There we met Don Magersupp, 10-year resident of 4312 Ridge Avenue.

Magersupp has a concrete stormwater flume on his property that was built by the former resident. He said water coming downhill from the property has been a problem for years, and it is getting worse. In fact, on examination, we found evidence of flooding behind every house on the north side of Ridge Avenue between Carroll Avenue and Washington Boulevard all of which border the property. Looking into his flume and up into the property we saw no flow of water—not even puddles. Evidence of erosion was obvious and widespread behind his house because the slope of the land flattened compared to farther up on the property where we could see a dry drainage ditch.

From Maple Avenue we could see the other end of the drainage ditch (again dry) and discovered the source of the stormwater that is causing flooding down to the intersection where we began: stormwater inlets on Maple Avenue that accept runoff from two areas: the HES parking lot and Maple Avenue from Summit Avenue to the entrance of the property.

On the Southern Crossroads Concept Plans pages 201 and 203 the dry drainage ditch we saw is designated as a wetland. This cannot be correct. Looking at the plans one can see that the contours of this ditch lead to the exact location of the stormwater inlet on Maple Avenue. The definition of a wetland from Merriam-Webster's dictionary is "land or areas (such as marshes or swamps) that are covered often intermittently with shallow water or have soil saturated with moisture." This is not the case.

Both Collins and Magersupp stated that they have notified the County about flooding issues and no action has been taken. From direct observation, eyewitness accounts, and simple deduction, it appears that the outflow from the stormwater inlets on Maple Avenue goes directly onto the property, unabated. From there it erodes the soil and gathers in volume, inundating properties on Ridge Avenue; during heavy rains Ridge Avenue floods (to the point where the local fire company closes the road). More water enters the stormwater inlets on Washington Boulevard and the resulting torrent finds its way down to the point where we began our investigation.

This mismanagement of stormwater is perpetuated and exacerbated by the existing infrastructure. This is a problem that must be corrected by Baltimore County (or both the developer and County) prior to any further development because there will only be more runoff from increased impervious surfaces from development on the property. All

residents from Maple Avenue to the intersection of Halethorpe and Jeanne Avenues, as well as the new owner of the property, should expect this problem to be solved before any development begins.

Compatibility with Existing Neighborhood

It is obvious from looking at the Concept Plans of the Southern Crossroads development that no thought or consideration was given to the existing community. One need only walk uphill on Maple Avenue from Potomac Avenue to see the charm and heritage of a well-established older community. First one passes a local church and then, continuing up this narrow tree-lined street, one sees a variety of single-family dwellings in neatly landscaped yards. As one approaches Summit Avenue, Halethorpe Elementary School comes into view.

Charles Kokoski, resident on Maple Avenue and HIA Board member, explains why Halethorpe is so special to him and his family:

We [have] lived in Halethorpe since 1952...[s]o we are long-term residents of Halethorpe.... We lived in Halethorpe over these many years because we wanted a village type neighborhood. We love Halethorpe because it is like small town America, and not a cookie cutter development.

The proposed development would appear as the opposite of this picture. From the Department of Planning's description: "[T]he proposed lotting pattern creates a dense grid layout which does not provide a balance between landscape and building..." and "The proposed layout with extensive linear streets/alleys and units on either sides...can create a 'walled' effect..." Too many large buildings are proposed for too small of a space.

In the "Additional Comment on the Plan" section of its report, the Department of Planning lists 25 points that need to be addressed. HIA applauds the Department of Planning for its thorough review of the concept plans and hopes each of these points has a positive impact on the next phase of the development design. Clearly, the proposed design for Southern Crossroads is lacking in so many ways that the Department of Planning was compelled to include plans from a totally different development to show a better approach to design.

The Southwest Baltimore County Revitalization Strategy was established to (among other things): "stabilize and enhance neighborhoods." While the residential zoning densities are addressed in the Department of Planning's report, the true nature of a neighborhood cannot be reduced to just these numbers. As stated, Halethorpe has been here for 130 years. It is a pleasant, peaceful, quiet neighborhood. The addition of 196 townhouses will neither stabilize nor enhance this community.

The Department of Development Plans Review points out that proposed plans indicate 2.75 acres of open space rather than the 4.5 acres that are required. HIA is interested to see the outcome of this discrepancy and is against the Department of Recreation and Parks granting a "payment of a fee in lieu for the open space." There is no substitute for open space in a community. Playgrounds, fields, and park-like settings are essential features that will enhance the quality of life for residents, and make it more compatible with the existing neighborhood.

Uncertainty about "Reserved for Future Use" Areas on the Concept Plans

Of the 71.98 acres, 27.1 are designated "Reserved for Future Use." It is unclear what might be developed on more than one third of the property. With four different zonings on the property, many different uses could be accommodated. This ambiguity is troubling. HIA believes that the decisions that are made for the initial development of Southern Crossroads will set the standard for any future use development. This is of great concern to HIA. If the initial building phase is not in compliance with all applicable codes and laws, and if it does not relate to the surrounding neighborhood, then the future use areas may well bring alarming side effects to our community.

Halethorpe is a well-established older community that is home to generations of families. HIA endeavors to preserve and enhance this community. While all the codes and laws and numbers are very important, to see the true

essence of a neighborhood one needs to look beyond them. In an effort to show what makes Halethorpe special, HIA includes the book *Halethorpe Heritage: A Story of a Maryland Community* with this Community Input. Author Barry Lanman describes this book in his Author's Note as "...a collection of historical narratives, oral history accounts, personal reflections, newspaper articles, folklore, photographs and maps which were integrated to tell a story of this endearing community." This endearing community is our home.

HIA also welcomes change and looks to establish a working relationship with the new owner of the property. HIA is interested in working with both the new owner and County to devise solutions to development challenges that meet not only all County requirements, but also enhance the community as a whole.

Respectfully submitted with the unanimous approval of the Officers and Board,

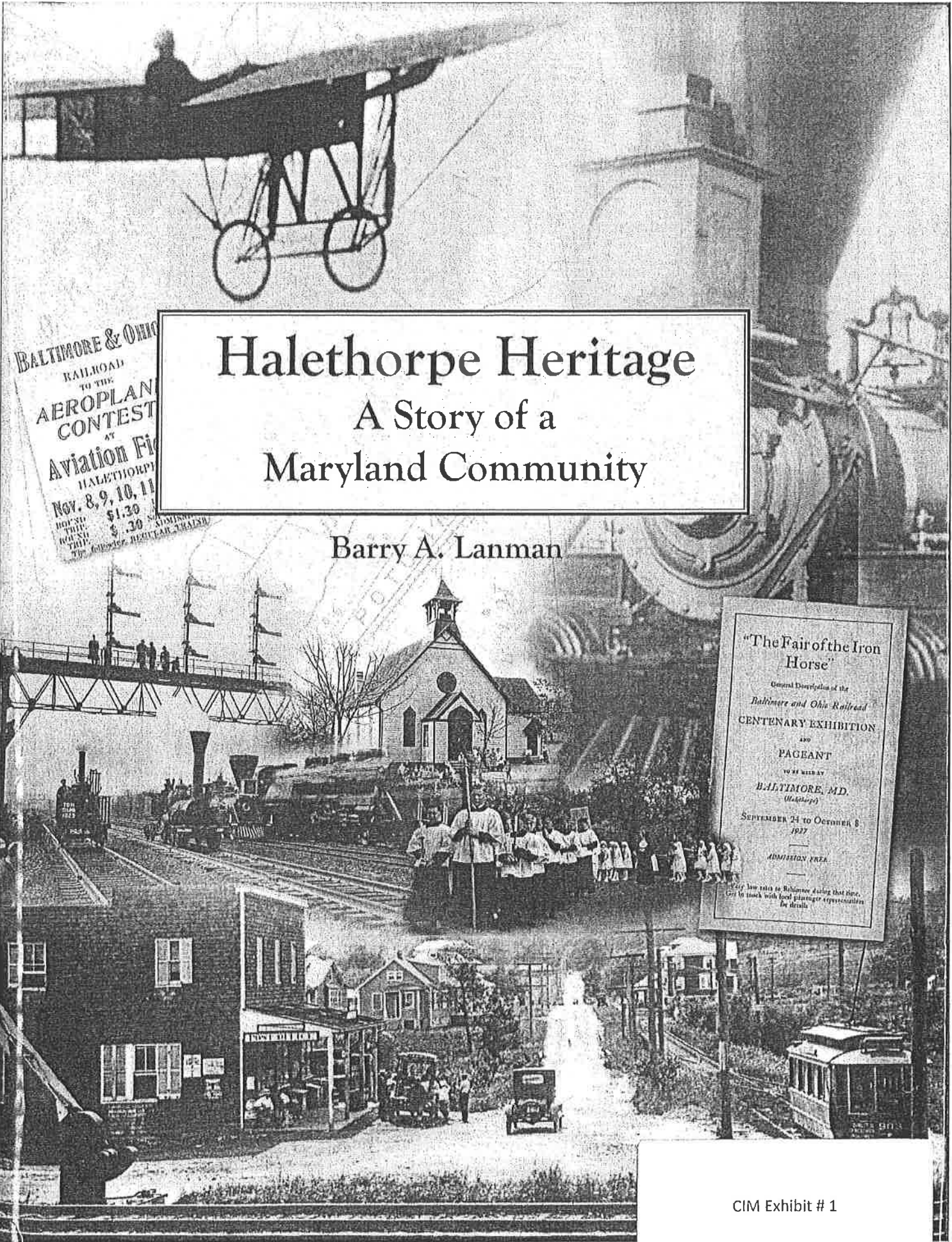
A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "William Carter". To the right of the signature, the word "For" is written in a smaller, simpler font.

Michael McAuliffe, President, Halethorpe Improvement Association

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