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Some Say Md. Research Center Will Be a Study in Sprawl

By [Miranda S. Spivack](#)

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Joe Alfandre rode the early wave of new urbanism in the 1980s when he built **Kentlands**, a small New England-like village where residents can walk to stores, schools and jobs. The Gaithersburg development endured financial problems but has been widely replicated across the country.

This "city" should be built on top of the Shady Grove Metro station!



The Johns Hopkins University campus in the Shady Grove Life Sciences Center. Hopkins and Montgomery officials are developing a site nearby. (By Jonathan Ernst For The Washington Post)

So Alfandre, now a member of the Montgomery County Planning Board, assumed that a proposal by Johns Hopkins University for a world-class "science city" nearby would incorporate new urbanist principles.

Location is the primary decision! Time is the scarcest resource.

But when the blueprint came before the planning board last summer, he found himself **casting the lone vote against the 20-million-square-foot project**. The science city would include several villages, constructed around existing buildings. Alfandre, state officials and some local residents worry that the development could exacerbate traffic and create sprawl, not contain it.

"The proposed plan is one of water spilling helter-skelter across a flat surface instead of a concentration of new growth into a vibrant city center," Alfandre said as he urged the County Council last month to revise the plan.

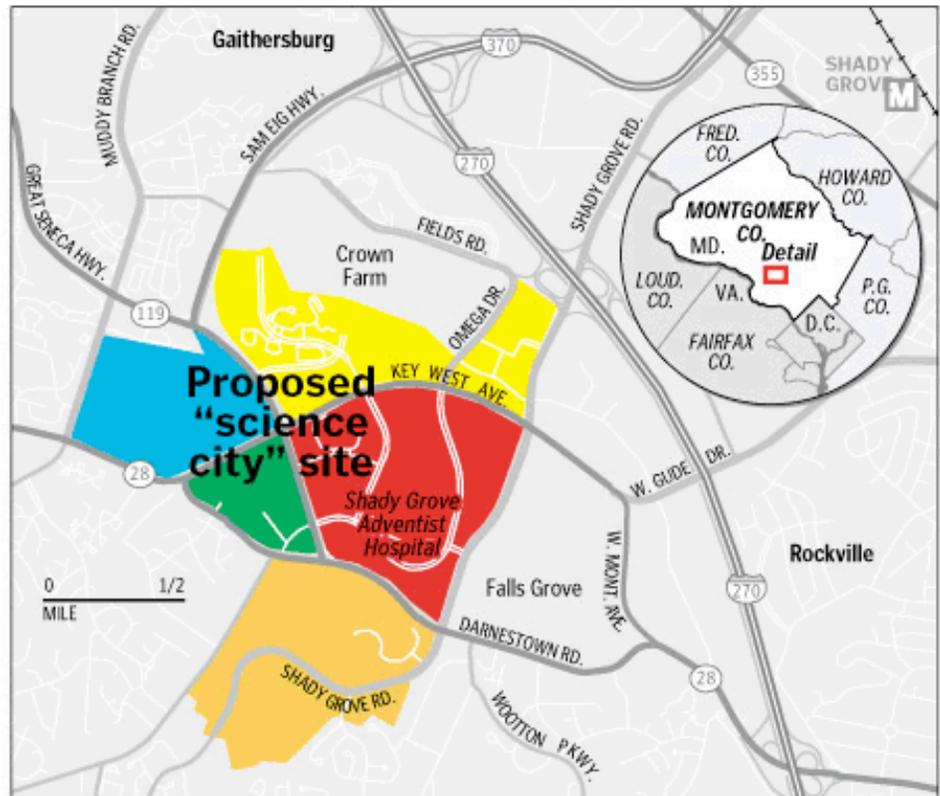
Hopkins officials have promised a \$10 billion scientific community that would rival the Research Triangle in North Carolina and Palo Alto, Calif., and rank among the world's best.

The \$5 million Hopkins paid to buy the land is the least important part of this whole decision!

Montgomery County Executive Isiah Leggett (D) and other political and business leaders predict the community would boost the county's revenue and bring thousands of high-paying jobs in the next 30 years.

Jobs / Housing balance?

They hope to build on the presence in Montgomery of the National Institutes of Health, the National Institute of Standards and Technology, the Food and Drug Administration, offices of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, and the Universities at Shady Grove, which includes Hopkins, the University of Maryland, Towson University, Salisbury University and Montgomery College.



The master plan would divide the life sciences city into five districts, to be linked by a 3.5-mile multiple-use path called the LSC Loop. One district would include Hopkins's project, which would be research buildings, public open space and some retail.

THE LIFE SCIENCES CITY DISTRICTS ARE:

- North**, which has access to Interstate 270 from Shady Grove Road and Interstate 370, also called the Sam Eig Highway. It has residences and several office buildings and would include a station for the proposed Corridor Cities Transitway.
- Central**, home to the J. Craig Venter Institute and Shady Grove Adventist Hospital.
- South**, anchored by the Universities at Shady Grove and the headquarters of Human Genome Sciences.
- West**, anchored by the 60,000-square-foot Shady Grove Innovation Center and the 52-acre, county-owned Public Service Training Academy in Rockville, which officials hope to replace with housing.
- Belward**, owned by Johns Hopkins. About half of the 107 acres would be used for research, retail and a proposed transitway station. Officials say there will be no housing on the site.

In many ways, the debate over how best to design the science city embodies the challenges facing the county in the next 30 years. Officials want to accommodate an expected influx of more than 200,000 residents and hope they can offer them high-paying jobs that can strengthen the tax base.

Live where ? read sections 39a and 39b on the Woodmont Triangle page of www.VirtualAdjacency.com

But there is little buildable land left in Montgomery. To construct a project of the magnitude envisioned by Hopkins, planners say they have little choice but to work around the businesses and buildings already there. They also must find a way to pay for expensive new transit systems and roads -- predicted to cost at least \$1.3 billion. Taken together, it doesn't lead to the construction of the urbane living and working environment newcomers are likely to want, Alfandre said.

"I know we can do this right," Alfandre said as he drove through the area recently, weaving in and out of lunch-hour traffic. It's a place where few can walk anywhere for a bite to eat; instead, workers jump into their cars to go a few blocks. The closest Metro station, Shady Grove, is four miles east. The proposal endorsed by the planning board requires more transit, walkways, bike paths and roads, but Alfandre says that won't overcome problems arising from the creation of multiple villages.

The Maryland Department of Transportation also has expressed reservations, pointing out that the proposed number of jobs is far greater than the proposed amount of new housing. The state estimated the project could bring an additional 32,000 commuters who are unable to live there.

"That's it, in a nutshell," Alfandre said when he learned of the state's concerns.

Ben Ross, president of the Action Committee for Transit, a local advocacy group, said the county should be developing the project closer to the Shady Grove Metro station.

"We are firmly convinced that a large, dense, transit-oriented, white-collar employment node can be created in Montgomery County, only within walking distance of a rail station," he said. And even if there is transit nearby, he said, the state's data suggest that it will not be heavily used.

Residents near the area have geared up an extensive campaign, adopting the slogan "scale it back."

"The Gaithersburg West Master Plan will create a massive high-density high-rise commercial development that will bury us in traffic!" some residents say on their Web site www.scale-it-back.com.

Hopkins officials think their proposal is the key to creating an innovative community that mixes residential, research and retail and which could bring about 47,000 new jobs and triple the county's life sciences industry. They say their plans would expand and link up with the Shady Grove Life Sciences Center to transform the area into a high-density community with a total of about 60,000 jobs and about 9,000 new residences, offices and academic buildings.

Do not forget Virtual Adjacency!

"We want people to live and work there, to run into each other in the street, however casually,"

said **Elaine Amir**, who heads Hopkins's Montgomery campus, in the midst of the area slated for redevelopment. "It fosters the collaboration. Ultimately, we are looking for great scientific breakthroughs," she said.

There are about 7 million square feet of mostly low- to mid-rise office space in the area, a small amount of retail in nearby strip shopping centers and mostly single-family suburban developments surrounding the area. The proposal would allow taller buildings, up to 100 feet in some areas, scaling down near existing neighborhoods.

The planning board said it would not allow the plans to move ahead unless money also is approved for construction of the proposed [Corridor Cities Transitway](#), which would connect the area by light rail or rapid bus to the Shady Grove Station and run north to Germantown and Clarksburg. Leggett has said also that roads would need to be widened and some interchanges built.

This center should be built on top of the Shady Grove metro station!

Time is how people measure distance.

- *With my envisioned repair of Metro-proximate zoning, this could become a real asset in bigger ways!*

Planning Board Chairman Royce Hanson acknowledged that the plan has imperfections. But he said the county needs to rethink the area so it can grow in an environmentally sound way and expand the number of high-paying jobs.

"Our position was that if we were starting from scratch and there was not a hospital there and all the medical buildings, it would have been a good idea" to have one central downtown, as Alfandre has proposed, Hanson said. But nothing major is likely to be razed, so Hanson and the planning staff developed several clusters or villages with buildings, streets and walkways, near transit.

"This is a good place. It has the potential of being served by public transit with the Corridor Cities Transitway. It has the basic road network already," Hanson said.

The County Council will begin to discuss the details this month.

David McDonough, senior director of real estate development for Hopkins, said the plan will be a boon to the community.

"Either it will be a world-class center for science and innovation, or not. We think the potential is there to achieve that," he said.

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Previous Owner's Family Aren't Fans of Plan

By Miranda S. Spivack
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www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/10/03/AR2009100302833.html?sid=ST2009100302835

Belward, one of the last large pieces of undeveloped land in Montgomery County, is a key element of Johns Hopkins University's proposed science city.

But the family that sold Hopkins the land is dismayed by the current proposal, which holds the possibility of taller, more densely packed buildings on the property that might include research facilities, some retail and public, open space.

Just minutes from Interstate 270 and ringed by suburbs and several large biosciences firms, the 138-acre property was sold to Hopkins by Elizabeth Banks for \$5 million two decades ago.

Banks's nephew Tim Newell said his aunt had offers of up to \$54 million from developers for the property. But she chose to sell to Hopkins to keep it from suburban developers.

This is a breathtaking fact! Wow!

"We are not people of means," he said. "This is more important: to save the property. My aunt never married and did not have children. The farm was her life. She was so attached to it in every sense of the word," Newell said.

The deed said that after Banks's death, the land would be used for "agricultural, academic, research and development, delivery of health and medical care and services, or related purposes only."

University and county officials say they believe the current plans will create a world-class center like California's Palo Alto or North Carolina's Research Triangle, where students, teachers, researchers, entrepreneurs and government officials can live, work and create the intellectual synergy that can lead to scientific breakthroughs.

A 1997 plan from Hopkins outlined a proposal for three- and four-story buildings that would be similar to the nearby Shady Grove Life Sciences Park, which is home to major biotech companies, including BioReliance and the Institute for Genomic Research.

"We were okay with that," Newell said. "It would have been a college campus."

David McDonough, who is spearheading the project for Hopkins, said the deed does not restrict design, architecture, height or density. "It only addresses 'uses,'" he said. The project "is fully

compliant with the deed." Planning Board Chairman **Royce Hanson** echoed that view. The board approved the master plan for the area in July.

Newell said he discussed the family's vision in a 2005 meeting with Hopkins officials, after his aunt died.

"I said **we were thinking about something Jeffersonian, like the University of Virginia,**" he recalled recently. He said he was assured by Hopkins officials that the property would look like a college campus.

"The one my aunt turned to to protect the land from development has become the kind of developer my aunt was trying to protect against," Newell said.

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