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The SRSOD State Rail Station Overlay Districts legislation would empower MoCo to achieve a broad range of critical public benefits with efficiency, elegance and power.

Highlights and comments by Jay Hellman

Bethesda's tall buildings offer up rooms with views

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by Stephanie Siegel Staff Writer

Looking out at the expansive view from the boardroom in Greater Bethesda-Chevy Chase Chamber of Commerce office, Chamber President **Ginanne Italiano** can see for miles.

“This is our pride and joy,” she said, “our boardroom.”

From the 12th floor of one of downtown Bethesda’s dozens of high-rises, she can see Silver Spring in one direction and Friendship Heights in the other.

But she can also see something less tangible — potential.

What might be most remarkable about the view from the boardroom is all the empty space that high in the air.



Charlie Shoemaker/The Gazette

The 12th floor boardroom of the Greater Bethesda-Chevy Chase Chamber of Commerce, one of Bethesda’s tallest buildings, looks out on a handful of other high-rises. New development will bring additional high-rises to the downtown.

All of the surrounding buildings are stories below. But that will change as the Woodmont Triangle Amendment, which allows for greater building height and density in parts of downtown Bethesda, ushers in a new generation of high-rise buildings among the dozens of soaring towers that already make up Bethesda's skyline.

The Woodmont Triangle Amendment to the Bethesda Central Business District sector plan **makes allowances for developers to build at a greater height and density in return for providing public amenities.**

One of the county's most urban areas, downtown Bethesda is home to 41 high-rise buildings with 12 or more floors, according to Emporis, a real estate research company.

And for those lucky enough to live or work in those buildings, their view can be a source of beauty, entertainment or even a distraction.

Capt. Richard Vinci, deputy Navy medical inspector general, works on the top floor of Bethesda's tallest building, the tower at the **National Naval Medical Center.**

The view, he said, is "magnificent."

Completed in 1942, the building is also the oldest high-rise in Bethesda, according to Emporis. It measures **264 feet tall with 19 floors of offices.**

Even at that stature, Bethesda's tallest buildings are relatively small compared to some of the most famous tall buildings in the country. The **Washington Monument measures about 555 feet at its apex**, while **Seattle's Space Needle is 605 feet tall**. The **Empire State Building** in New York **stands at 1,250 feet**. The tallest building in the North America is the **Sears Tower at 1,451 feet.**

From the top floor, Vinci said, he can see out in any direction.

"Looking north, we command a magnificent view of the Rockville skyline and Rockville Pike," he said. "Looking east, we can see the Mormon Tabernacle and nothing is prettier than seeing that during the sunrise with the pastel colors, or the glow when it's dark. ...Looking south, you can see the spires of the National Cathedral and the top third of the Washington Monument. ...And west, the

Imagine a variety of building heights, where some of the existing 1, 2 and 3 story buildings are preserved AND IMPROVED with energy-efficient HVAC; GREEN ROOFS ...

Taller and thinner, well-designed new buildings will be separated, ensuring blue sky and open space benefitting all.

And the preservation of some of the existing buildings (and businesses) would retain community character derived from historical unique funkiness and variety making the experience of place something special.

The SRSOD legislation encourages and enables this.

>> **Please see tabs 9, 8, 7a, 13**

view is of the beautiful grounds and the NIH buildings.”

Ellen Crown, deputy public affairs officer at the medical center, works on the eighth floor of the tower. She said **her view makes her office a more pleasant place to work.**

“It’s really, really nice to have the natural light and the view,” she said. “It makes me appreciate our command and its history. I’m very grateful to have a great view.”

For Italiano, whose office window looks out upon Woodmont Triangle, the scene took some getting used to.

“In my office when I first got here, I got caught up with looking out the window,” she said. “Then I turned my desk sideways.”

From her office in the Landow Building at 7910 Woodmont Ave., she can see Veteran’s Park, where crowds gathered to hear concerts all summer long; the tall construction crane at the site of the old Giant on Arlington Road and the patchy roofs of so many small buildings in Woodmont Triangle that could one day be replaced by more tall buildings.

In fact, the view from the chamber’s boardroom helped create the Woodmont Triangle Amendment — which ironically could end up blocking the view.

Italiano said that the chamber invited each of the County Council members and **former Planning Board Chairman Derick P. Berlage** into the boardroom to see first-hand how much density was being unused under the old building height regulations.

But as the plans for new developments start to be approved and threaten that famous boardroom view, Italiano isn’t concerned.

And, views are valuable.

Montgomery County will enjoy increased real estate tax revenues as a result of the SRSOD.

*The **environment** will also benefit considerably, as not having to demolish all the little old buildings saves considerable energy and does not generate waste that must be trucked and dumped somewhere.*

*And, by enabling clustering, which the Woodmont Triangle Amendment almost does — with two easily corrected **fatal flaws***

1) preserving “standard density” on the sending site, and NOT requiring investment to improve and preserve the EXISTING BUILDING; and

2) failing to remove dysfunctional, harmful, arbitrary linear-math quantitative limits on height and density ...

*Adding floors to a tall, thin, well-designed new building increases density **without increasing impervious area.***

*Think of an elevator as a “vertical Metro.”
It delivers pedestrians to the sidewalk with NO CAR!*

And, sidewalk-located retail needs CUSTOMERS to survive, just as our Metro and bus systems do.

More walking / less driving: PUBLIC HEALTH benefits!

>> Please see tabs 4a, 4b, 5, 28a.

“It’s such an exciting environment,” she said. “It makes it even more eclectic.”

While Anne Martin said she can’t see far from her office on the eighth floor of the Artery Building at 7200 Wisconsin Ave., she can see a lot.

“[My view] is more interesting, not because I can see all the way to Tyson’s or anything like that, but because it’s right over the Barnes and Noble,” at the corner of Bethesda and Woodmont avenues, she said. “I get to see all the activity and all the people.”

On occasion, she said, she has freaked out friends who she happens to see crossing the busy intersection by calling them and reporting to them their exact location.

Aside from the people and activity, though, she said one of the nicest things about her view is that she can still see nature behind the increasingly urban landscape.

“It’s nice to be able to see the sunset in the fall,” she said. “Just seeing all the trees around. Even though we are right here downtown, we still have all these trees around.”

*Another most significant benefit of the SRSOD
is how it will empower local government to easily locate parks and trees optimally in the urban area.*

Plus, some of the money local government is paid for allowing increased density in SRSOD-design-review-approved tall, thin, new buildings, can be used to purchase strategically important open space in rural areas for habitat contiguity, scale, for water quality protection, for recreation ...

>> Please see tabs 10a, 10b, 19,