

February 7, 2024

GMU Braddock Rd Adjacent Community Coalition

Brecon Ridge, Brecon Ridge Woods, North Hill, Chancery  
Park

To: Gov. Glenn Younkin      [www.governor.virginia.gov](http://www.governor.virginia.gov)  
    Hon. Gerry Connolly      [www.connolly.house.gov](http://www.connolly.house.gov)  
    Sen. T. Kaine              [www.kaine.senate.gov](http://www.kaine.senate.gov)  
    Sen. M. Warner            [www.warner.senate.gov](http://www.warner.senate.gov)  
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Cc: GMU President's Council

GMU Board of Visitors

Recently, the named neighborhoods became aware of advanced plans by George Mason University to develop the West Campus in a way that is disproportionate to the problem they claim to address. A "Town Hall" meeting held on January 29, 2024, can only be considered a "check the box" activity, as will be explained below. At this meeting, the Athletic Director, Mr. Lewis, stated that the mission was to enhance the experience of student athletes on the baseball team by developing fifteen acres in the West Campus. This would be achieved through the construction of a 10,000-seat stadium by Mr. Sanjay Govil, owner of the Washington Freedom Cricket Club. The comment was made that with Mr. Govil funding this, it would not be burdensome for the university. Mr. Govil would then allow the GMU baseball team to use his stadium. For a team with an average attendance of 150 people per game, as per Mr. Lewis, this is an excessively disproportionate response. There is no cricket team at GMU. While they do have an intramural club, the roster currently shows 430 players, approximately 1.1% of the student population. Once again, this does not address an overwhelming need at the university. Research shows that the top

ten NCAA Division I teams have stadiums seating 3000 – 5000. The visual image of 150 people in a 10,000-seat stadium is laughable.

This entire program revolves around the commercial use of state property, with some entities paying no state and sales tax. These actions are repressive to already existing local businesses. Site maps in the presentation show other commercial and retail spaces planned. It is unclear how these would be funded. To be fully transparent, GMU needs to detail each phase, infrastructure improvements, the types of businesses planned, residential housing figures, funding sources, revenue for the university, etc., and present that in an open forum for the community. A genuine Town Hall meeting – not a Zoom presentation.

When one looks at the Mason website, they tout they are a research-focused enterprise, and their motto is “Freedom and Learning.” This concept addresses neither aspect of the motto. It appears to be a land grab and an effort to enhance the reputations of the people pushing for this development with no regard for the adjacent communities and the negative impacts on them. At a Special Meeting of the Board of Visitors called in December, the meeting minutes show that less than half of the board voted in favor of the land lease. The meeting minutes, erroneously, state it was a unanimous vote. This lack of transparency is troubling on such a substantive issue. The lack of transparency by university leadership was also evident when university staff were finally made aware of this project on January 22, 2024, while plans had been underway since 2021. This hiding of crucial, community impactful news from staff who could allay community concerns, if approached, is appalling and professionally offensive.

Aside from this covertly run program, there are genuine issues that will affect the neighborhoods in this coalition.

Four principal issues: traffic, noise/light pollution, loss of green space, and disruption of wetlands.

Traffic: Development of the West Campus has been under discussion since 2017. Notable in this current, frenzied-pace plan is the fact that the university is ignoring the massive transportation improvements identified in the 2017 plan required for successful development of this property. Apparently, in the university’s haste to secure Mr. Govil’s funding, they are ignoring the transportation and road improvements outlined in the Mason-West-Fairfax-Campus-Vision-June 2017 documents that would require considerable construction for the development of this property. Obviously, the seduction of Mr. Govil’s money is far more important than the impact on the surrounding communities. The best response here is that these road and traffic improvements be fully completed before we add a facility with 10,000 seats and the attendant traffic.

When the issue of parking and traffic was raised in the Q&A portion of the Town Hall, the canned response was language like “minimal disruption.” With no plans to immediately build adequate roadways

and parking, our neighborhoods will be overrun by people parking here and walking to the stadium. This is not an acceptable way for GMU to address these issues. All neighborhoods in this coalition have a single access/egress point. Three on Braddock Rd. and one onto Rt.123. Already we are affected when there are events at Eagle Bank Arena, sometimes taking 20+ minutes to travel less than half a mile. The addition of a 10,000-seat venue, with an average attendance between 7000-8000, per Mr. Govil, would create a stranglehold over these communities.

It is our understanding that at least early on the county had suggested a more preferable site, Patriot Park, with access to the Fairfax County Parkway. There is minimal residential density at that location, and the traffic issues would be much less. There is no clarity why this option was rejected. One can assume it was financially driven, both by the university and Mr. Govil. Research shows that Mr. Govil has the licensing for the 2024 T20 World Cup, and this proposed facility has been listed as a possible location. No wonder the construction schedule is accelerated. That sort of stadium and related events are inappropriate and destructive to the current infrastructure.

Noise/Light Pollution: The stadium boasts that they will have broadcast-quality lighting and several jumbotron video scoreboards. With the siting of this stadium so close to Braddock Road, the spillover noise and light pollution will be significant. Once again, this lack of transparency and disregard for the established neighborhoods is appalling. Certainly not a valid example of Diversity and Inclusion, which the university boasts about.

Loss of Green Space: Green spaces play a vital role in our well-being and the health of the environment. Green spaces improve mental and physical health, they improve biodiversity and habitats for plants, animals, birds, and insects and act as a natural filter purifying both air and water. Green spaces improve the quality of the surrounding environment, and this plan has a negative impact on green space. As adjacent neighbors, this is a vital issue that needs to be addressed before any grading or construction begins.

Disruption of Wetlands: This property is part of the East Fork WMA and the Upper Popes Head WMA. Our community base is remarkably familiar with these WMA and the Resource Protection Areas as they are on many of our neighbors' property as well. There are very stringent requirements regarding what can and cannot be done in or near these areas. No one has addressed this issue, and it is unclear how the upstream work, done on Mason property, will affect downstream property owners. This must be addressed before any work begins.

The coalition's request is simple. Halt all action until a thorough and proper evaluation can be accomplished with all affected parties in attendance. While we recognize change is necessary, it also needs to be targeted and sized appropriately to address known university problems with consideration

of adjacent neighborhood concerns paramount. The creation of a commercial zone that benefits some and punishes others on state-supported property is an egregious abuse of positional power.

We are your neighbors. Why not try treating us as such. Do not let a covert, non-transparent, personal reputation-enhancing play destroy all of that.

Thank you for your time in reading this missive. We know it is long, but brevity will not suffice at this critical juncture.