

August 20th, 2021

VIA EMAIL AND FIRST-CLASS MAIL

Darryll J. Pines
Office of the President
University of Maryland
1101 Main Administration Building
7901 Regents Drive
College Park, MD 20742

RE: Support for Western Gateway Project

Dear President Pines:

I am writing on behalf of the Graduate Student Government (GSG) at the University of Maryland, College Park to express support of the proposed Western Gateway development project located at 7500 Mowatt Lane. The proposed partnership between the University of Maryland, College Park and Gilbane Development will bring 300 critically needed below market rate graduate housing units to the University and 81 owner occupied townhomes geared towards attracting University faculty and staff.

Affordable graduate housing units near campus are desperately needed. Specifically, a recent market and demand analysis survey of UMD graduate students that was conducted by The Scion Group found that 66% of graduate students spend over 30% of their total household income on rent. Approximately half of all graduate students reported difficulty finding housing within their budget. It is evident that our graduate student body has been drowning in debt due to the high cost of living near campus. Importantly, one third of single graduate students and 41% of students with families reported difficulty finding a place to live within a reasonable commute to campus. A shocking statistic shows 11% of graduate students commute more than 45 minutes to campus, with another 12% commuting 36 – 45 minutes, and another 38% commuting 15 minutes or more to campus. This has resulted in nearly half of single survey respondents and 63% of those with families traveling to campus in a personal vehicle. Moreover, the survey found that 75% of graduate students at the University of Maryland support the project and feel it is a convenient place to live. Western Gateway's proposed below market rent and convenient location across from campus would provide students an affordable, safe, and modern place to live in College Park with close proximity to campus and mass transit. In addition to providing affordable housing, the proposed Western Gateway Project would alleviate the need for graduate students to drive cars to campus by providing a convenient and approximate place to live reducing carbon emissions.

Given the nature of the partnership, Western Gateway will provide the below market units without the State of Maryland or the University incurring any upfront development or construction costs. These costs, along with the costs of long-term maintenance, will be borne entirely by Gilbane Development using the value of the vacant land to subsidize the rental rates - a creative and sustainable model. The project exemplifies the value of transformative partnerships, advances University housing and sustainability goals, including the University's goal to achieve carbon neutrality by the year 2050, and represents the type of smart growth and transit-oriented development supported by the State of Maryland, Prince George's County and the City of College Park. The proposed development will be immediately adjacent to existing graduate housing and walkable to the schools of business, journalism, art and architecture. Additionally, the development will be within quarter mile from the under-construction Adelphi Rd. - UMGC - UMD purple line station and Southern Gateway's 73,000 SF of retail, which includes a specialty grocery store.

We are aware of the recent concerns raised by certain community groups. We believe Western Gateway is exactly what state, federal, county, local, and university policies hope to spur with the State's \$6 billion infrastructure investment in the Purple Line coupled with the County's Plan 2035 that aims to create local centers around transit, all focused on increasing density around transit to reduce carbon emissions that contribute to climate change by taking graduate students and cars off the road. We also believe that the University and Gilbane Development have worked diligently to address these concerns and remain committed to creating the most successful project possible. Over the course of the project, Gilbane and the University have participated in more than 30 key stakeholder meetings. As a result of community and stakeholder input, meaningful enhancements have been made to the project, including stepped architecture to protect the viewshed, a reduced number of parking spaces, increased affordability of rents, alterations to the access road, a state-of-the-art stormwater management system on site with a storage capacity of 1 million gallons of water, and a net increase in tree preservation and reforestation located within the counties Plan 2035 designated rural and agricultural area that exceeds county and state requirements.

Because the proposed development advances important GSG goals, we hope the Board of Public Works will approve the project to allow the University and Gilbane Development to move forward with a project that, as described above, clearly advances GSG's objectives of providing below market Graduate Student Housing to attract the brightest and best graduate students, faculty, and staff supported by a robust transportation network within steps of the University.

GSG looks forward to continuing to work with Gilbane Development and all the key stakeholders to implement this transformative project and we appreciate your willingness to assist in the effort to bring the benefits of this project to fruition.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Tamara Allard', with a stylized, cursive script.

Tamara Allard
Graduate Student Government President
University of Maryland – College Park

CC:

Autumn Perkey, VP for Legislative Affairs and Speaker for the Assembly
Annie Rappeport, VP for Financial Affairs and Student Fee Matters
Neil Dhingra, Director of Operations
Jianna Howard, Chief of Staff
Haley O' Reagan, Chief of Staff