



Coalition for Smarter Growth

Choices for our communities
Choices for our region

October 4, 2005

Dr. Alan G. Merten
President
George Mason University
4400 University Drive
Fairfax, Virginia 22030

Dear President Merten:

We are deeply concerned about the location in Loudoun County that you have proposed as the site for another campus of George Mason University. We urge you to consider alternate locations.

Our region is already consuming land for development at a far too rapid rate, paving farmland and forests, destroying natural habitat, reducing groundwater recharge and water quality, and harming the Chesapeake Bay. Moreover, the failure to better link land use to transportation and to locate significant institutions like corporate offices and universities adjacent to transit has been a primary contributor to our traffic problems. As a public institution, George Mason University can and should set the standard for better land use and transportation decision-making in the region.

The site that you have proposed for a new GMU campus is planned by Loudoun County as a rural transition zone, based on a multi-year community outreach and planning process. Proposed amendments to that plan by the recent Board of Supervisors have been highly controversial, involved questionably close ties between developers and some elected officials, and are opposed by most Loudoun citizens. Over 15,000 citizens have signed a petition urging the county not to approve tens of thousands of houses on top of the 37,000 houses already in the pipeline. So, it is of great concern to us that GMU has struck a deal with a developer whose project and plan amendment are so contentious.

The location that you have proposed has neither adequate infrastructure nor the means to pay for it. Routes 50 and 15 cannot support current development, much less the traffic of a university campus and the new development proposals. In fact, county transportation planners say that Route 50 will be at a Level of Service F^{minus} (beyond failing) WITH the developer's proposed improvements.

4000 Albemarle Street, NW, Suite 310
Washington, DC 20016
(202) 244-4408. Fax (202) 244-4438
www.SmarterGrowth.net

We urge GMU to locate any new campus at a current or future rail transit station as you have done in Arlington. Such locations offer students, faculty and staff choices in how they travel to and from campus. Better transit access helps those who cannot drive or cannot afford the cost of driving. By integrating a campus with vibrant downtown areas, transit, and an array of community services, GMU will be able to enhance its attractiveness for the “creative class” described by GMU’s Richard Florida.

A number of business leaders are seeking tax and toll increases for transportation, but have failed to acknowledge that poor location decisions and development patterns are the primary cause of increases in per capita vehicle miles traveled, vehicle trips and traffic. We do not believe that our public universities should add to this costly problem, especially when it can mean the diversion of tax dollars from K-12 and university education. In fact, many leaders have been talking about diverting state general funds to transportation. Our universities should support better land use planning that reduces the need for and cost of transportation infrastructure, while saving scarce public revenues for our all-important education needs.

We urge you to reconsider your proposed campus location in Loudoun County and to work with the public to find a more appropriate location within walking distance of high-capacity transit.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Stewart Schwartz". The signature is fluid and cursive, written in a professional style.

Stewart Schwartz
Executive Director