

Statement of
David H. Moulton
Campaign for Bethesda's Madonna of the Trail
to the
Montgomery County Planning Board
October 23, 2019

Dear Members of the Planning Board:

On October 24, 2019 you are scheduled to consider the Bethesda Market, Sketch Plan No. 320190030. On behalf of the Campaign for Bethesda's Madonna of the Trail, I wish to bring to your attention the opportunity this gives you to address a long-standing deficiency in Bethesda's treatment of the Madonna of the Trail historic monument. The Sketch Plan proposes to increase the amount of green space and parkland behind the Women's Farm Market by putting the surface parking underground. This creates an ideal location for reincorporating our foremost historic monument into Bethesda's landscape. On page 40, the Sketch Plan requests that it be awarded points for installing "public art" into the project. The art has yet to be determined. We believe the Madonna of the Trail should be that piece of public art.

We have launched a website and a petition drive to relocate Bethesda's Madonna Statue to a site consistent with her historical importance and more prominent than the inappropriate site the statue currently occupies. Our petition has, so far, garnered over 500 signatures in favor of relocating the Madonna of the Trail to the Farm Women's Market site. This includes such prominent Bethesda supporters as former Representatives Connie Morella and Mike Barnes.

This statue has national significance as the first of 12 identical monuments celebrating the courage of pioneer women and marking the National Old Trails Road west from Maryland to California. It has state and local significance as one of the only statues depicting a woman in Maryland, and was dedicated in 1929 by then-Judge Harry S. Truman to a crowd of 5000 people. It has public art significance as the foremost example of the work of sculptor August Leimbach, who was commissioned to create the design that was used to cast each of the 12 statues located in each of the 12 states hosting the National Old Trails Road.

A series of earlier planning decisions, driven chiefly by the demands of Metro, has resulted in the current inappropriate and inadequate site for this monument next to the underground garage entrance to the Hyatt Hotel. Why is its current location inadequate? First, the statue is experiencing significant and constant vibration from the high traffic volume on Wisconsin Avenue and from the rumble of the Metro Red Line trains above which it sits. Second, its present location at the entrance to an underground garage and above a large Red Line air intake grate has rendered it an afterthought in Bethesda's streetscape and reflects a lack of interest and respect for its purpose and history. Third, in light of the

significant ongoing city redevelopment plans, the time is right to take action and show that Bethesda's citizens and businesses have the imagination and pride to elevate one of our very few historical monuments and important public art to a position of prominence consistent with its place in our community.

Our petition focuses on the Farm Women's Market development for several reasons. First, the expansion of parkland would provide a safe setting away from the traffic and subway vibrations while still maintaining her important connection to Wisconsin Avenue and the National Old Trails Road. The site is on the east side of the Wisconsin, so that the statue could be sited with the gaze of the woman fixed on the western horizon instead of the east. The site would provide the proper scale for a statue that is 10 feet high on an 8-foot base. In addition to finding a safer and more appropriate location for the statue, the expansion of the parkland in conjunction with the renovation of the market is a golden opportunity to show respect for one of the only statues in Maryland honoring women. It could be positioned in the new parkland in view of pedestrians on Wisconsin Avenue, providing a point of interest that would draw passersby into the market area and the park.

We urge all concerned to consider the opportunity presented by this development to restore this historic monument to a position of prominence in Bethesda's landscape.

Thank you.

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