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Plans for Gaithersburg West leading to tension, Floreen says

Council president, opponent spar at Democratic breakfast club

by Erin Cunningham | Staff Writer

Montgomery County Council President Nancy M. Floreen acknowledged Monday morning that discussions over the Gaithersburg West master plan have become tense.

The growing frustration over the plan erupted Monday at the Rockville/Mid-County Democratic Breakfast Club where Floreen was speaking.

Donna H. Baron of North Potomac said the plan — which calls for the transformation of the Shady Grove Life Sciences Center into an 800-acre "Science City" over the next 30-plus years — is "too big."

Science City would eventually be home to 20 million square feet of research and office space, 8,000 homes and 60,000 jobs.

Floreen (D-At large) of Garrett Park interrupted Baron as she was criticizing the plan.

Floreen called Baron's assertion that the plan is too big "incorrect" and when Baron continued to speak out against the plan, Floreen said, "Excuse me, I'm talking."

Baron is not a member of the club, and said she only attended to hear Floreen speak and get her "two cents in."

"Obviously, you can tell there are strong feelings," Floreen said to the more than a dozen people attending the breakfast at Rockville's Original Ambrosia Restaurant.

Floreen also spoke about transportation issues and Executive Isiah Leggett's (D) proposed fiscal 2011 budget, which was released Monday shortly after the breakfast.

Stephen Fischer, treasurer of the democratic breakfast club, said the group typically meets about once a month and the next meeting is scheduled for April 19.

Margaret Greene, 73, of Bethesda, asked Floreen what was being done to alleviate the "gridlock" on Montgomery County roads.

She said unless officials take the lead on transportation, the county will become an undesirable place to live and work.

Floreen answered that the capital budget being considered by the council includes road improvements, including a project on Montrose Road.

However, Greene said she was in favor of more transit projects.