

# Council members, residents voice opposition to Costco gas station

by Aaron Kraut, Staff Writer, *The Gazette*. Published: Thursday, May 10, 2012.

*This story was corrected on May 11, 2012. An explanation follows the story.*

Council members and residents opposed to Costco's planned gas station at Westfield Wheaton shopping mall gathered Thursday in Rockville to discuss potential health and environmental consequences of the 16-pump station, which would be Montgomery County's largest.

Council member Marc Elrich (D-At large) of Takoma Park, [who in April sponsored a zoning bill](#) that would prohibit large gas stations within 1,000 feet from any school, park, hospital or other public recreation use, held a press conference with bill co-sponsors Valerie Ervin (D-Dist. 5) of Silver Spring, Nancy Navarro (D-Dist. 4) of Silver Spring and residents from the nearby Kensington Heights neighborhood.

Last week, the [county Board of Appeals delayed essential zoning hearings](#) on the station until after the council decides whether to adopt the new regulations. Council member Craig Rice (D-Dist. 2) of Germantown co-sponsored the legislation when it was introduced on April 17. Elrich said council member Hans Riemer (D-At large) of Silver Spring has since signed on as a co-sponsor.

"I thought that the Board of Appeals would have something to hang health concerns on," Elrich said. "But I realized that this became a technical matter and the science and health had nothing to do with it. I'm sorry that it's late in the game but knowing it at the point that we know it, I feel that we're compelled to do something."

In April 2010, the County Council opposed a plan backed by County Executive Isiah Leggett (D) that would have allowed Costco to bypass the special exception process. That came after the council approved a \$4 million subsidy to Westfield Wheaton to help build the warehouse store, which is expected to open in October.

In a statement provided by Costco Director of Real Estate Development Erich Brann after the bill was introduced, Costco said it hoped the special exception process would go forward.

"Two years ago, the county council rejected a proposal that would have allowed Costco to proceed with the fueling station without special exception approval. Instead, the county council encouraged Costco to adhere to the special exception procedures in place," read the statement. "Costco expects that the Montgomery County procedures in place which they were requested to follow will allow for a thorough and objective evaluation of all of the required site specific scientific analysis that has been conducted."

At the press conference on Thursday, the Kensington Heights Civic Association introduced Dr. Henry Cole, a former senior scientist with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Office of Air Quality, Planning and Standards, who they hired as an expert. Cole said Costco's air quality report, prepared by Sullivan Environmental Consulting, was incomplete, vague and its conclusion that the gas station will have no significant impact on air quality to nearby residents was wrong.

"I've looked at thousands of environmental impact assessments and I was telling [Elrich] that this is at the bottom of the heap in terms of quality," Cole said. "The errors are so glaring that I think they must have thought they were dealing with uneducated people."

[At a Costco open house on April 25](#), David Sullivan of Sullivan Environmental Consulting said his company monitored carbon monoxide at Costco's Sterling, Va., gas station and found levels well below Environmental Protection Agency guidelines.

Kensington Heights Civic Association treasurer Karen Cordry said the group has spent \$15,000 in preparations for the special exception hearings.

*An earlier version of this article misstated Dr. Henry Cole's former profession.*