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Board of Municipal & Zoning Appeals
417 E Fayette St., #1432
Baltimore, MD 21202

Re: Appeal 2013-29, 5901-21 Harford Road

Dear Board Members:

I am writing to express my support for the proposed Royal Farms at 5901-21 Harford Road. This proposal, if enacted, marks another step forward in the continued revitalization of the Harford Road business corridor.

The proposed Royal Farms would be in keeping with the general character of this stretch of Harford Road, which is largely defined by buildings that are set back from the street and properties with significant yards or plantings. A Royal Farms would also provide a necessary product for the predominantly car-dependent neighborhoods of Northeast Baltimore. Rather than fight every auto-oriented business, we should, when possible, seek to locate these businesses intelligently within the urban fabric.

Perhaps most importantly, if this appeal is approved, Royal Farms has agreed to give up a significant portion of their land on the north side of their property to accommodate the proposed realignment of the three-way intersection between Harford Road, Glenmore Avenue, and Old Harford Road. This intersection is notoriously difficult for motorists and pedestrians to navigate, and the existing traffic pattern at this site is currently unsafe. In 2012 alone, there were 19 accidents that police responded to at this intersection. In the past ten years, 21 accidents at this location required a response by an ambulance, and in two of these accidents victims had to be extracted from vehicles. I have been seeking a way of making this intersection safer for years, and we are fortunate that we finally have a property owner who is willing to cede a significant portion of their land in order to make this intersection realignment a reality.

My staff and I have researched the gas station proposals before the BMZA during my tenure on the City Council. From 1995 to 2011, the BMZA heard 65 cases that proposed new or significantly expanded gas stations. In each case, the Board took into account a comprehensive set of factors that are mandated for consideration in the City Code. 36 proposals were approved outright, and 27 were approved with conditions to ensure public safety and neighborhood cohesion. The Board only denied two of these 65 proposals. The first BMZA denial was in 1997. In that case, the operator ignored the

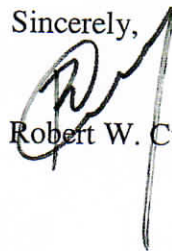
community, did not attend any community meetings, and refused to ameliorate the proposed design. The operator was a bad actor with a bad proposal – very different circumstances than the case now before the Board.

The second BMZA denial was in 1998 when Royal Farms sought BMZA approval for placing gas pumps at their store at the intersection of Harford Road and Echodale Avenue. That site was simply too small for this use and would have resulted in a dangerous traffic pattern. I fought Royal Farms then, and the BMZA denied the conditional use for gas pumps.

In contrast, the conditions at 5901-21 Harford Road are amenable to gas pumps. The site is larger and can accommodate the proposed use. Traffic safety will actually improve with Royal Farms' yielding the northern section of the lot. The conditions around the site are also more desirable for this proposal. As opposed to Harford and Echodale, where buildings are dense and pedestrian-oriented, this proposal will complement the existing urban development. Royal Farms, as a major local business, could even inspire further local investment in our community.

I am aware that some constituents are opposed to Royal Farms' proposal, and Royal Farms has been made aware of these concerns at numerous community meetings. I have shared some of these concerns, particularly with regard to traffic patterns around the site. In response to these concerns, Royal Farms has agreed to reduce the number of proposed gas pumps, reduce the size of the proposed convenience store, reduce the number of parking spaces, increase green space, and give up a significant chunk of their property to accommodate the planned traffic realignment. In addressing these concerns, Royal Farms has proven to be a responsive company that is willing to work with us as a community partner. As it stands, we have a choice between a business run by a responsible Baltimore-based company or a vacant building in a prime commercial location. I choose the former.

Sincerely,



Robert W. Curran

RWC: jwm