

Costco still hopes for mega-gas station

by [Cavan Wilk](#) • March 11, 2013

After the Montgomery County Council passed a [law](#) that was intended to prevent Costco from opening a mega gas station adjacent to its new Wheaton store, the Planning Board [recommended against the gas station](#).

The next step is a [set of 6 hearings](#) before the Office of Zoning and Administrative Hearings.

In a comments on [Wheaton Patch](#), "ED" says:

I'm happy the hearings are postponed until after the [April 10] Costco opening. I think the residents of Wheaton will be up for a rude awakening when they see the traffic for Costco.

If the Costco will bring in 4,000-5,000 customers per day (per Westfield's estimates a couple of years ago), how many more cars will they bring in if a mega-gas station is offered? I can only hope that someone has a camera when Costco opens and takes the pictures to the hearings.



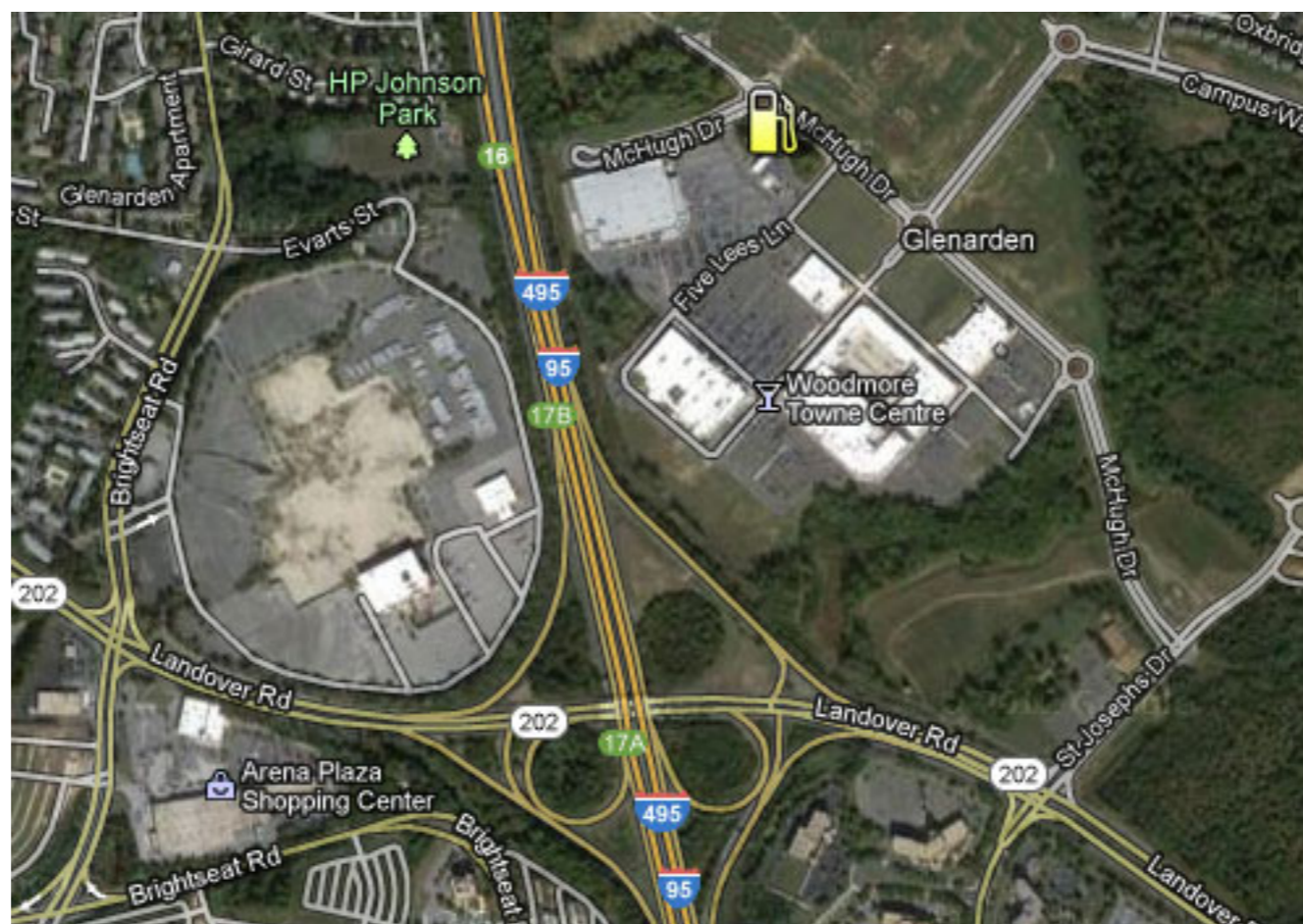
Cars line up to get gas at a Costco station in Sacramento. Photo by [multimediaimpre](#) on flickr

Just as I [previously wrote](#) about the topic, a mega-sized Costco gas station is incompatible with the [Wheaton Sector Plan](#), passed January 2012, that calls for a more walkable urban Wheaton. There are few uses that would impede Wheaton's revitalization and redevelopment than a mega-sized Costco gas station.

Such a use would require extra road infrastructure that would create an unwalkable dead zone. A lot of land that would be better used for more walkable urban formatted amenities would be taken up with bigger multi-lane access roads that will have idling cars lined up at all hours of the day.

The Montgomery County DOT will be especially reluctant to design any roads for pedestrians instead of cars with massive numbers of vehicles constantly traveling to and from the gas station.

Here is an aerial view of a the **Woodmore** Costco store that has a gas station:

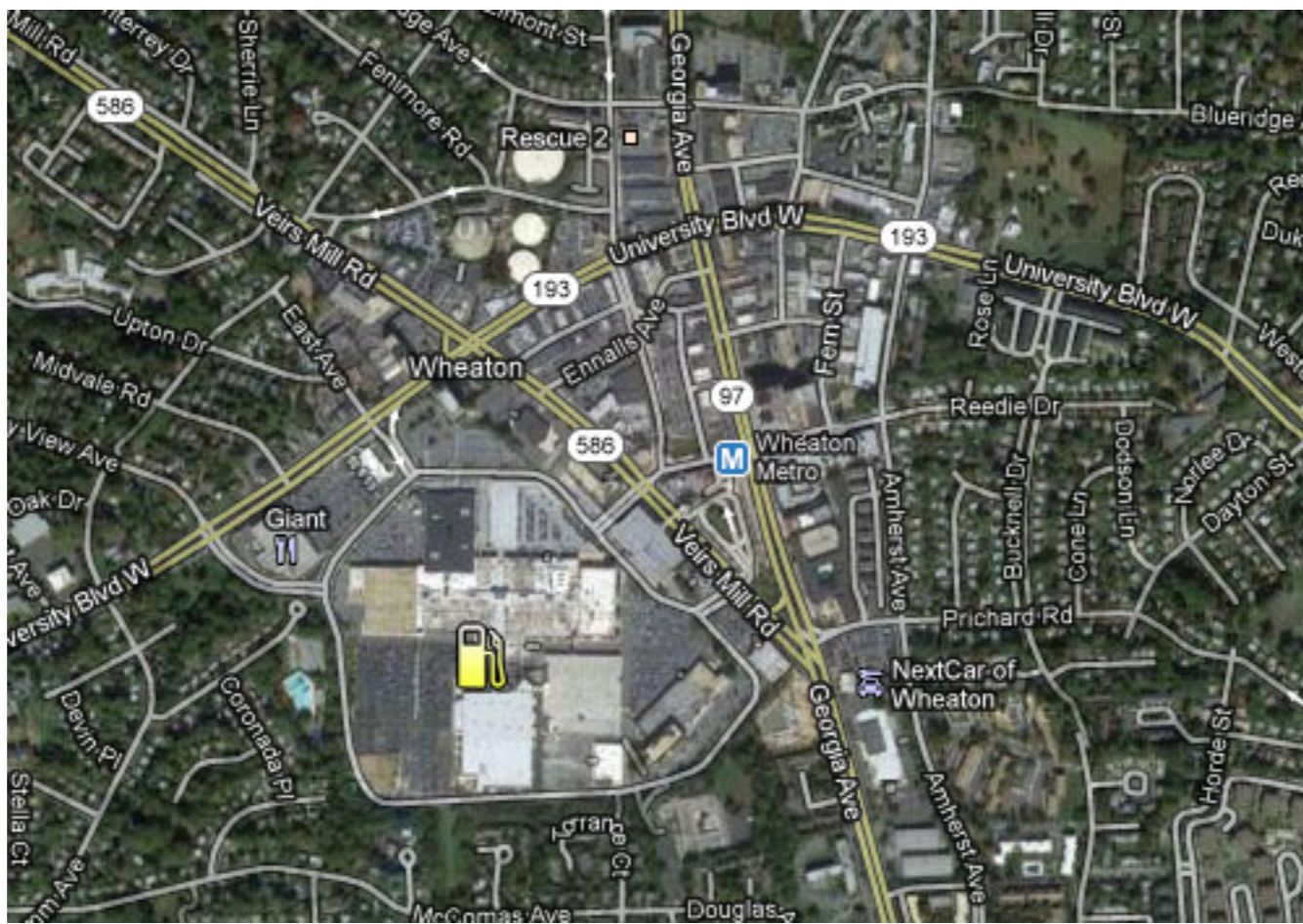


Images from Google Maps.

The Costco store in **Gaithersburg** does not have a gas station:



Finally, here is the Wheaton site. The Costco is scheduled to open April 10:



The Wheaton site is wholly unlike the Woodmore site, which is extremely car-oriented, and has no Metro station or legacy street grid. It is also much more urban and pedestrian-oriented than the Gaithersburg site. The Wheaton site is comparable to the Pentagon City Costco. Just like in Gaithersburg, that store has no gas pumps.

Costco is a nationally successful business that will clearly make a healthy profit at the Wheaton store. I don't think anyone would dispute that the store will be packed from the day it opens. Costco clearly does good business in neighboring Gaithersburg and Arlington without gas pumps.

The next round of hearings is part of the process for special zoning text amendments. The hearings have been rescheduled for April 26, May 1, May 6, May 14, May 17, May 20, May 23 and June 4. All hearings will be at 9:30 am in the Stella B. Werner Council Office Building, Second Floor Davidson Memorial Hearing Room, at 100 Maryland Avenue in Rockville.

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Cavan Wilk became interested in the physical layout and economic systems of modern human settlements while working on his Master's in Financial Economics. His writing often focuses on the interactions between a place's form, its economic systems, and the experiences of those who live in them. He lives in downtown Silver Spring.



Comments

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...and we're getting ready for a Costco gas station in DC, partially because the an ANC commissioner there claims that the poor folk who live in the neighborhood would be underserved if they didn't have a gas station on their side of South Dakota Avenue (nevermind the fact that there are multiple gas stations on the other side of the

street).

oh, and don't forget that said commissioner has been in a series of recent court cases with Joe Mamo, the guy who used to support him and owns those other gas stations.

sorry, this was barely on topic, but I had to vent :)

by [Geoffrey Hatchard](#) on Mar 11, 2013 1:56 pm • [link](#) • [report](#)

It's the good old "traffic" argument that we hear from NIMBYs all the time. Traffic is a part of living in a dense area. It is not a good enough reason to block the construction of an apartment building, a supermarket, or a gas station.

by [aaa](#) on Mar 11, 2013 2:08 pm • [link](#) • [report](#)

Speaking of DC where the near monopoly of station ownership has produced excessive gas prices, it would be great to have an independent operation. Are Costco prices lower than average where stations exist? Might this be a reason to support Costco pumps in Wheaton and elsewhere?

by [David Marlin](#) on Mar 11, 2013 2:34 pm • [link](#) • [report](#)

@David Marlin

In my experience, Costco generally has cheaper gas. The one where I grew up (Harrisburg, PA) could be consistently relied on to have gas \$0.05-\$0.10 per gallon below the bigger "discount" gas stations (turkey hill, sheetz) and \$0.10-\$0.20 below the mobil/exxon/shell stations.

by [Nick](#) on Mar 11, 2013 2:48 pm • [link](#) • [report](#)

AFAIK, you need to be a Costco member to buy gas at their stations. It's been my experience, anecdotal of course, that people who buy gas at Costco gas pumps were already going to the Costco store. Buying gas at the station was just part of their Costco trip.

I just don't see why this gas station is any more of an issue than other gas stations. In fact, in many ways it is probably less of an issue because it is going to draw its customers heavily from people who were going to drive to the location in the first place.

by [Potowmack](#) on Mar 11, 2013 3:23 pm • [link](#) • [report](#)

Costco does have cheaper gas, but it's only available to Costco members, making price comparison pointless unless you are a Costco Club member. I personally belong to BJ's, and i've sat in some pretty long lines at some of their store gas stations, particularly the ones in the Baltimore Area that i've visited, but generally find the lines shorter for gas at the stores in PG County.

by [Gull](#) on Mar 11, 2013 3:24 pm • [link](#) • [report](#)

Potowmack, please read the previous pieces I wrote about this topic to see why a gas station at this Costco is a bad idea. I'll include links at the bottom of this comment.

1) It's next to a Metro station. The gas pumps and associated car queuing infrastructure will hurt walkability in a place that is explicitly zoned to be more walkable and urban.

2) Gas pumps leak. There is a public pool and single family residences about 300 feet from the proposed gas pumps.

Here are the links:

greatergreaterwashington.org/post/16599

greatergreaterwashington.org/post/5847

by [Cavan](#) on Mar 11, 2013 4:25 pm • [link](#) • [report](#)

Don't really care one way or the other. There still won't be much of a draw in wheaton, except for a couple of good Asian restaurants.

by [Chris S.](#) on Mar 11, 2013 4:56 pm • [link](#) • [report](#)

Frankly, the alternative of not having the Costco gas station at the proposed site would just mean more parking spaces. It would not make the site any more urban/walkable.

The focus should be on re-developing more immediate areas north and south of the Metro station, like what is being done with the reincarnated Safeway.

by [Wheaton Resident](#) on Mar 11, 2013 5:41 pm • [link](#) • [report](#)

@Geoff

I would love if the DC Costco got gas. I need to buy gas either way, and would love to save an extra .10c over the inflated DC prices. Would love to never again have to contribute a dollar to Mamo and his monopoly.

by Kyle-W on Mar 11, 2013 5:47 pm • [link](#) • [report](#)

Years ago, there was a Shell station at Wheaton Plaza on Md. 586 (Viers Mill Road), roughly where the Wendy's stands today. Not as big as the proposed Costco station, but it was a **busy** gas station.

There was also a Montgomery Ward's Auto Service Center (not a gas station, but a massive automotive shop that sold tires, shocks and brake repairs and the like) in a stand-alone building on the parking lot roughly south of the present-day Target.

And even with the Wheaton Metrorail station and the goals and aspirations of the planners at M-NCP&PC and the Montgomery County Council, this shopping center is a suburban and auto-oriented place (long before there was a Wheaton Metrorail station, the former Wheaton Plaza was served by **many** transit bus routes with destinations as far away as Beltway Plaza in Prince George's County (via the University of Maryland's College Park campus), downtown Silver Spring, Rockville, Olney and Montgomery Mall.

by C. P. Zilliacus on Mar 11, 2013 8:10 pm • [link](#) • [report](#)

Word of mouth but my neighbor told me the DC Costco was getting gas.

by Tom Coumaris on Mar 11, 2013 11:02 pm • [link](#) • [report](#)

I still don't understand why Wilk is pretending the parking lot would be a walkable paradise without a gas station. Wouldn't slow, directional traffic even be safer for pedestrians?

by selxic on Mar 12, 2013 7:12 am • [link](#) • [report](#)

I've never understood the push back with this.

To buy gas there, you have to be a Costco customer, i.e., their cars were going to be in the lot anyway. Not having the gas station isn't going to reduce traffic one iota, and the alternative (as many have mentioned above) is simply a large open parking lot.

One could make arguments that Costco shouldn't be there in the first place, but that ship sailed long ago.

by Costco on Mar 12, 2013 8:33 am • [link](#) • [report](#)

Can someone please define/quantify what a "MEGA" gas station is compared to a normal gas station? How many pumps are we talking about?

by Anonymouse on Mar 12, 2013 1:02 pm • [link](#) • [report](#)

Here is a closer look at the Woodmore location, Anonymouse.

[View Larger Map](#)

BJ's and Costco often have the somewhat more efficient (although they use more space) directional lanes instead of multiple pumps in a row.

I own a station close by to an Costco Gas and would like you to think about some other effects these stations does;

From a consumer point of view Costco gas might seem like a great idea. However like any other big corporation they have endless sources to manipulate the towns and general public. They don't care about people living around or small business.

Before making a decision please consider following;

- Costco station will bring unfair competition, since they WILL sell under the cost to get more customers on their stores. At the end, they are not after a few pennies that those stations will bring. In the long run, this will effect most stations in the area. You may or may not like the other stations but these stations are mostly individually owned and operated small businesses depending on you. Think about all those small lumber yards and hardware stores around before Home Depot arrived.

I don't know this particular one but the one in my area creates traffic, air pollution and brings the quality of life down in the area. Since it has only one entry and exit from main road and shares same road with Home Depot it is always a challenge to get in and out specially weekends.

For 300sf extension to our existing store, we spend more than a year between the variance board, and construction department. Costco got their gasoline station approval - without any public meeting - in two months. To do that only thing they had to do was a contribution of \$30K to highway department, present the case with number of attorneys.

As most of you know, sometimes you go in there for two things and walk out spending \$200 with 20 different things. Think about the items in your garage, and think about what really you need in your life to live maintenance free.

Does Costco really serves us or we serve corporate America?

by Sunergy on Mar 13, 2013 5:54 pm • [link](#) • [report](#)

Having read the comments posted up to now, I must say I'm disappointed that so many would care so little for the people whose homes and community pool would be so close to this bank of pumps. Anyone who has ever filled a tank at a gas station knows that fumes escape, and with that many pumps, that's a LOT of fumes--just from the pumps, not even counting exhaust from the cars. I recall that Costco at one time said it ALWAYS had this many pumps at its stores and couldn't do with fewer, but now it turns out there is a store just up the road in Gaithersburg without pumps. Clearly the pumps are not necessary for Costco to make a very tidy profit. As for the argument that we get asphalt anyway, if not lanes for the pumps, then more parking lot, I say, how about demanding trees there among the parking spaces? Please, folks, share the vision of a pleasant, walkable Wheaton. There's more to life than gas @ 10 cents less per gallon.

by AnneinSilverSpring on Mar 13, 2013 9:00 pm • [link](#) • [report](#)

As someone who lives right up the mall, it's about the fumes and the cars sitting there to refill. Fumes spread, and there is a community pool right on the other side of the road from where the Costco will be. I don't live close enough to be affected, but I live close enough to KNOW that it will definitely affect anyone who lives in Kensington Heights right outside of the mall area. I'm a fan of Costco and i'm glad they are coming, but this location is just NOT suitable for their gas stations, it's TOO close to homes. The right decision has been made!

by brjoro on Mar 19, 2013 4:51 pm • [link](#) • [report](#)

