To: Knoxville-Knox County Planning Commission
Re: Formal Opposition to Proposed Assisted Living Development on Westland Drive

Dear Members of the Planning Commission,

I am writing to express my strong opposition to the proposed conversion of property along Westland Drive from its current Planned Residential (PR) designation, allowing up to five dwelling units per acre, to an assisted living development.

While I recognize the importance of providing quality assisted living facilities for our growing community, responsible development requires more than identifying an available parcel of land. It requires careful consideration of public safety, existing infrastructure, environmental preservation, and the long-term consequences for surrounding neighborhoods.

I strongly believe this proposal represents an inappropriate use of this particular property and that its approval would create unnecessary risks and potentially irreversible consequences for the surrounding community.

1. Serious Traffic and Pedestrian Safety Concerns

My foremost concern is the impact this development would have on Westland Drive, an already heavily traveled thoroughfare.

Westland Drive carries substantial traffic, and introducing an assisted living facility would generate additional vehicle movements associated with employees, visitors, deliveries, transportation services, and potentially emergency medical vehicles. These activities would introduce additional turning movements and potential conflicts along a roadway that already presents significant traffic and safety challenges.

Of even greater concern is pedestrian safety. The absence of a nearby traffic signal or designated, protected pedestrian crossing raises serious questions about the suitability of this location for a facility serving an older and potentially mobility-limited population.

An assisted living facility should be located where residents, visitors, and employees can access surrounding areas safely. Encouraging or potentially requiring pedestrians to navigate a busy roadway without appropriate crossing infrastructure creates an entirely foreseeable safety hazard.

It would be irresponsible to approve a development serving a potentially vulnerable population without first establishing that safe pedestrian access and adequate traffic controls can be provided.

2. Proximity to the Children's Hospital and Additional Public Safety Concerns

Another significant concern is the proximity of the proposed development to the existing children's hospital facility.

The presence of a medical facility serving children and families introduces an additional level of responsibility when evaluating nearby development and roadway safety.

Children, parents, caregivers, medical professionals, and patients with mobility limitations may already be traveling through this area. Depending on the services provided, medical transportation and other specialized vehicles may also require reliable access.

The addition of a separate assisted living facility, with its own employees, visitors, deliveries, and transportation requirements, could further complicate traffic conditions along this section of Westland Drive.

This is especially troubling given the absence of adequate controlled pedestrian crossings in the immediate area.

The Commission should evaluate whether the cumulative traffic generated by the existing medical facility and the proposed development would create unsafe turning movements, increase congestion, obstruct sightlines, or interfere with timely access to medical services.

The safety of children and families accessing medical care, as well as older adults who may reside in the proposed facility, must receive greater consideration than the convenience of developing this particular parcel.

A location serving multiple vulnerable populations demands a higher level of scrutiny, not a willingness to overlook existing roadway limitations.

3. Loss of a Critical Residential Buffer

The property in question is not simply vacant land awaiting development. Its existing wooded character serves an important and practical purpose for the established residential neighborhoods immediately behind it.

This land currently provides the only significant natural separation between residential backyards and the substantial traffic activity along Westland Drive.

That buffer contributes to neighborhood privacy, reduces direct exposure to roadway noise and visual impacts, and helps preserve the residential character of the surrounding area.

Removing or substantially reducing this vegetation to accommodate a larger institutional-style development would permanently alter that relationship.

An assisted living facility could introduce substantial building mass, exterior lighting, parking areas, service operations, and increased activity immediately adjacent to established homes.

These impacts cannot be evaluated solely by looking at the boundaries of the proposed development. They must be considered in the context of the families and homeowners whose properties directly adjoin it.

The existing natural buffer is an essential component of this residential area, not unused or expendable land. Its destruction should not be treated as an acceptable or unavoidable consequence of development.

4. Environmental Impacts: Protection of the Creek, Pond, and Natural Habitat

The presence of both a creek and a pond in the immediate area raises substantial environmental concerns that warrant careful examination before any development approval is considered.

These natural features contribute to the area's environmental character and may play important roles in stormwater management, drainage, wildlife habitat, and the surrounding ecosystem.

Converting wooded and undeveloped land into buildings, parking areas, access drives, and other impervious surfaces has the potential to significantly alter how rainwater moves across the property.

Increased stormwater runoff could affect the nearby creek and pond through erosion, sediment accumulation, pollutants carried from paved surfaces, and changes to existing drainage patterns.

Of particular concern is the potential for downstream impacts or changes in water levels that could affect surrounding residential properties.

The existing trees, vegetation, and natural ground cover help absorb rainfall, stabilize soil, and protect the surrounding environment. Removing these features may increase the likelihood of flooding, drainage problems, and long-term deterioration of nearby water resources.

The pond also deserves independent consideration rather than being treated as an incidental feature of the surrounding landscape. Its ecological function, drainage characteristics, and relationship to the nearby creek should be evaluated before approving alterations to the property.

I believe it is essential that the Planning Commission require a comprehensive environmental assessment addressing:

- Existing drainage patterns and potential changes in stormwater runoff.
- Potential impacts on the creek and pond, including sedimentation, water quality, and erosion.
- Preservation of appropriate natural stream and pond buffers.
- The effects of tree removal and land clearing on surrounding properties.
- Potential flooding and downstream drainage impacts.
- Protection of existing wildlife habitat and natural vegetation.

Once a wooded landscape, creek corridor, or natural pond environment has been significantly altered, the resulting environmental damage may be difficult or impossible to reverse.

Approval should not be granted without clear evidence that these valuable natural features will be adequately protected.

5. Compatibility With the Surrounding Residential Community

The established residential neighborhoods along this portion of Westland Drive represent substantial long-term investments by homeowners who reasonably expect land-use decisions to consider the character and stability of their community.

The proposed change from a planned residential designation to an assisted living use raises legitimate questions about compatibility with these established surroundings.

This concern is not an objection to assisted living facilities or to the individuals who would reside in them. Such facilities provide an important service and deserve locations that are safe, accessible, and appropriate for their operations.

The issue is whether this particular location can reasonably accommodate such a development without imposing disproportionate impacts on neighboring properties, existing medical facilities, and surrounding natural resources.

A development of this nature should not be approved merely because the property is available or because the proposed use serves a legitimate community need.

A worthwhile development can still be the wrong development for a particular location.

6. The Responsibility to Consider Cumulative and Long-Term Consequences

Land-use decisions have lasting effects. Once this property is cleared, developed, and placed into operation, the loss of its natural buffering function, potential environmental impacts, and changes to traffic patterns cannot easily be reversed.

The Planning Commission has a responsibility to evaluate not only the immediate merits of a proposal but also its long-term implications for public safety, neighborhood compatibility, environmental protection, and the continued safe operation of nearby medical facilities.

The cumulative impact of these concerns is particularly important.

Taken individually, increased traffic, pedestrian safety limitations, the removal of mature vegetation, proximity to a children's hospital, and potential impacts on a creek and pond each warrant serious attention.

Taken together, these concerns raise fundamental questions about whether this property is suitable for the proposed development at all.

Approving the proposed use without fully addressing these issues would place the burden of those consequences on the surrounding residents and the broader community.

The applicant should be required to demonstrate, through comprehensive and independently reviewed analysis, that the proposal will not create unacceptable traffic hazards, compromise pedestrian safety, adversely affect the creek or pond, interfere with access to nearby medical services, or substantially diminish the protections currently afforded to adjacent residential properties.

The burden should be on the developer to establish that this is an appropriate and safe location, not on neighboring homeowners to prove the extent of potential harm after the property has already been developed.

Formal Request for Denial

For these reasons, I respectfully but firmly urge the Knoxville-Knox County Planning Commission to **deny the proposed land-use change and associated development request**.

At a minimum, no favorable action should be taken without a thorough traffic impact study, an independent pedestrian safety assessment, a review of the cumulative effects on traffic and access near the children's hospital, comprehensive environmental and stormwater evaluations addressing both the creek and pond, and a clear and enforceable plan for preserving the existing natural buffer.

Community growth and the expansion of assisted living services are important. However, neither should take precedence over public safety, responsible environmental stewardship, or the protection of established residential neighborhoods.

Westland Drive is already a busy roadway. The nearby children's hospital creates additional safety considerations. The adjoining creek and pond represent environmental

resources deserving protection. The wooded property provides a critical buffer between existing homes and a major thoroughfare.

These are not isolated or minor concerns. Together, they present a compelling case that the proposed development is fundamentally incompatible with the surrounding area.

The Commission's responsibility extends beyond determining whether a development can physically fit on a parcel of land. It must consider whether that development belongs there and whether its consequences are acceptable for the community it will affect.

I ask the Commission to prioritize the long-term safety of residents, children, patients, pedestrians, and motorists; the preservation of our natural environment; and the protection of established neighborhoods over the immediate interests of this development proposal.

I strongly urge you to reject this request and preserve the existing land-use protections until a proposal that is genuinely compatible with the surrounding community is presented.

Please include this letter in the official public record for the application and give these concerns full consideration before making a decision.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Douglas J. Rhodes

The Pointe at Heritage Lake Community