

Attn: Frederick Hill, Chairman  
Board of Zoning Adjustment  
441 4th Street NW, Suite 2108  
Washington, DC 2001

Re: BZA Application No. 19452

Dear Chairperson Hill,

Thank you for allowing me to testify today. I'd like to take this opportunity to present my view, first as a private citizen, and then as the commissioner for the single member district 5B03.

First, as a resident of the District, I applaud the government's effort to construct short-term housing for families that lack proper shelter. As a resident of the Brookland neighborhood, living 3.5 blocks from the proposed Ward 5 Short-Term Family Housing Facility at 1700 Rhode Island Ave, NE, I support construction of the facility and encourage the BZA to grant the special exceptions necessary to move this project forward.

My family and I are lucky enough to live in Brookland, but I know that this is not an opportunity available to everyone in our city. As a father of two ~~happy~~ kids, my wife and I extremely fortunate to be able to provide a home for them to sleep, grow and just be kids. While my wife and I are in a position to provide a comfortable life for our children, I believe it is incumbent upon the entire community to ensure that all city youth have their basic needs met.

① While I am aware of the concerns raised regarding the height and the density of the proposed building, I do not believe that either is out of line with existing and planned buildings and projects along the Rhode Island Avenue corridor. I believe that more density along Rhode Island Avenue will help to stimulate growth, which could benefit all members of our community. The Brookland, Woodridge, and Langdon Park neighborhoods are family-oriented communities well-suited to welcome families in search of stability.

② Similar to my predecessor, in tandem with this project, I hope to see increased District support for general improvements to the Rhode Island Avenue corridor. As called for in the Comprehensive Plan, the area greatly needs increased streetscape and pedestrian safety improvements, job training programs, and economic development initiatives.

Now, I would like to share a few additional thoughts in my capacity as ANC Commissioner for 5B03. Prior to my election as ANC Commissioner, I was invited to join the neighborhood advisory team by my predecessor. Since my election, I have taken over as co-chair of the advisory team. Since my election in November, I have held two single member district meetings, invited DGS/DHs and their zoning attorneys to present to one full ANC body meeting, helped coordinate a walking tour and have canvassed the area around the site three times.

Through my conversations with neighbors, I have identified three distinct views about the proposed site. The first view is that of neighbors who would welcome the site as proposed, allowing for all variances. The second view is that of neighbors who welcome the housing facility at the location but have reservations about some aspect of the design. Most of the reservations are around the height of the building and the parking, especially given the fact that there are a number of elderly neighbors residing directly across from the proposed site. The last view is that of neighbors who do not want a facility at the proposed location at all. Regardless of the view that they hold about the design, the vast majority of the neighborhood believes that the site selection process was flawed even if they are in favor of the ultimate outcome.

Since the initial selection process, DGS and DHS have gone to great lengths to solicit community feedback. I believe many of the concerns around parking can be addressed through a detailed good neighbor agreement. As such, as an ANC commissioner, I recommend that BZA grant the special exceptions necessary to move this project forward, with the exception of the one regarding building height.

Brookland is a welcoming and diverse community that can and should strongly support our neighbors who are experiencing difficult times. Construction of this shelter is an important step in the ongoing effort to providing the city's children and underserved families with the opportunity to achieve a better life.

Sincerely,

Henri Makembe