



COUNCIL OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

THE JOHN A. WILSON BUILDING
1350 PENNSYLVANIA AVENUE, N.W.
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20004

February 5, 2007

Carol J. Mitten, Chair
D.C. Zoning Commission
441 4th Street, NW
Suite 210
Washington, DC 20001

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Dear Ms. Mitten and members of the Zoning Commission:

Re: Zoning Commission Case No. 04-24 Rhode Island Avenue Metro Project PUD

I am writing to express my strong support for the Rhode Island Avenue Metro Plaza development and urge the Zoning Commission ("the Commission") to act favorably on Case 04-24, PUD (Phase II) application.

As a lifelong Ward 5 resident and now its Council Member, I am committed to the continued economic development of our Ward, particularly along the Rhode Island Avenue corridor. I view transit-oriented, mixed-use, smart growth development as an integral component of our overall development agenda and believe that the Rhode Island Avenue Metro Plaza will be a catalyst for further improvement in the community.

I have followed the community-based planning process of Rhode Island Avenue Metro Plaza quite closely and am pleased that the project meets our priorities for new development in Ward 5. It represents a major step in making Rhode Island Avenue a "great street" where residents and visitors enjoy walking, shopping and dining. By encouraging greater use of public transportation, it will help to mitigate the major traffic challenges we confront on this heavily traveled corridor. The developer has already begun working with the Department of Transportation to ensure coordination with other improvement initiatives along Rhode Island Avenue. The Metro Plaza will also complement plans for the Metropolitan Branch Trail that has been proposed to connect Union Station with Silver Spring following the Metro Red Line. It will be an ideal location for hikers and bikers along this trail and along Rhode Island Avenue to stop for rest or nourishment.

Rhode Island Avenue Metro Plaza meets the priorities of my constituents and enhances our overall economic development agenda. Since 2000, we have focused on several critical aspects of the project: affordable housing, community retail, architectural design and parking.

Affordable housing set-aside. While Ward 5 stakeholders welcome new high quality housing, it is important that such development is mixed-income in nature. Twenty percent of the residential units (54 units) at the Metro Plaza will be made affordable to households earning 50% or less of the area median income.

ZONING COMMISSION
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CASE NO.

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EXHIBIT NO. 20
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Community retail set-aside. It is also extremely important to Ward 5 residents that new retail development in our community includes opportunities for local community businesses to participate. We secured a commitment from the developer that 10% (7,000 square feet) of the retail space at the Metro Plaza will be set aside for local community businesses and that these businesses will be afforded the same discounts typically reserved only for national credit tenants.

Architectural design. When the developer initially presented conceptual designs for the Metro Plaza, community members requested three primary changes that resulted in a complete redesign of the project:

1. They did not want the privately owned parking to be located in a single, nine-story garage at the center of the site. Instead, they preferred to spread parking between low-rise garages hidden from sight. The developer reconfigured the site to include two residential buildings that wrap two discreet four-story garages.
2. They felt that the elevation along Rhode Island Avenue was too monotonous and requested that it be activated in order to enhance the overall look of the Rhode Island Avenue corridor. The developer made numerous changes in order to activate the buildings including alternating building depths; shutters; and a variety of colors, materials, window munton patterns and ornamental elements.
3. They requested that greater attention be paid to pedestrian safety in planning for traffic circulation on the site. The developer added several traffic calming devices including parallel parking along the private main street and the Metrorail station; a stop light at the intersection of main street and Washington Place; crosswalks at every potential pedestrian crossing; 5-10 mph speeds; and an additional lane of traffic on the site's southern perimeter road in order to accommodate more vehicular commuter traffic at that location rather than on main street.

Parking. Perhaps the most difficult issue to resolve has been parking. The developer has worked hard to balance the competing priorities of transit-oriented smart growth and local Metro riders' need for sufficient commuter parking. While the DC Office of Planning and WMATA initially agreed to the developer's proposal to replace approximately half of the Metro parking spaces currently onsite, community members were clear that additional parking was needed. The plan has evolved significantly over the past six years and now includes 100% replacement Metro parking, accommodated through a 215-space Metro garage; 140 Metro/Residential shared spaces in the private garages offered to Metro users at Metro rates from 7:00 am to 10:00 pm; and 33 Metro/Retail shared surface spaces. In addition, the developer has agreed to extend the meters on the short-term retail parking (168 spaces) from two to four hours in order to provide mid-day parking options for Metro riders who need to make short trips.

In short, Rhode Island Avenue Metro Plaza is an ideal example of the future of Ward 5. Our community has long waited for high quality, mixed-use development that encourages greater public transportation use. This project will bring much needed services to our community and the PUD application is another critical step along the way. I ask for your approval of the PUD application and thank you in advance for a prompt and positive decision.

Sincerely,



Harry "Tommy" Thomas Jr.
Ward 5 Council Member