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D.C. OFFICE OF ZONING

May 26, 2006

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via fax and e-mail

Zoning Commission District of Columbia
Office of Zoning
Suite 210-S
441 4th Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20001

ZONING COMMISSION
District of Columbia

CASE NO. 05-26 FAXEXHIBIT NO. 55

Attn: Alberto Bastida, Office of Zoning

Re: Zoning Commission Case #05-26 – Clark's PUD proposal for 2950 Tilden Street

Dear Commissioners:

I am writing to you to urge you to deny Clark's application for a PUD on Tilden Street.

I've lived in upper Northwest DC for 18 years, first at Van Ness and now in Friendship Heights. We chose these neighborhoods because of their convenient retail and public transit access and our household has managed to remain car-less the entire time we've lived here. In fact, it is my interest in public transit-friendly housing that has drawn me into local development politics.

I'm opposed to the Clark PUD for two reasons: it's an abuse of the PUD process and it would squander an opportunity to contribute to the diversity of housing types near Metrorail stations. This is a case where not only do you have a legal obligation to enforce the current R-2 zoning, but also where enforcing that zoning is a more effective way of pursuing the various public policy objectives that are offered as rationales for the PUD.

The PUD process has gotten totally out of hand in Ward 3. The zoning restrictions have ceased to have any meaning in this area because the Office of Planning is urging developers to play "Let's Make a Deal" rather than follow the law. (You saw that recently in OP's request that the Inclusionary Zoning text amendment exclude PUDs. I was heartened to see that you decided not to). Clark's application is beyond the pale – not only is the parcel size below the minimum required for a PUD in an R-2 zone; it's also less than half of that minimum, so, legally, the parcel still doesn't qualify for a PUD even if you are willing to declare it a project "of exceptional merit and in the best interest of the city or country." And this is not an exceptional project. It's a generic luxury condo building -- the kind we're currently overbuilding all over the Metro region. There's no reason to ignore the law in order to subsidize this kind of construction.

Which brings me to my second point. In addition to providing an important buffer between the bustle of Connecticut Avenue and the neighborhoods beyond, the R-2 zoning at the Tilden site incentivizes precisely the kind of housing that is scarcest near Metrorail

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Letter to Zoning Commission

Re ZC 05-26

26 May 2006

Page 2

stations – compact single-family homes. Small, expensive condos near Red Line stations exist in overabundance and thousands more are in the pipeline. You can find such housing in a couple of days. By contrast, it took us two years to find the kind of house (coincidentally, a duplex) within a quick walk of Metro. These are scarce. And as traffic congestion and gas prices increase, more affluent commuters would seriously consider giving up their ¼ acre lots in Northern Bethesda for a duplex or townhouse within a few blocks of Metro.

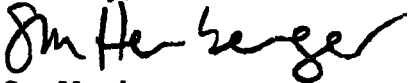
From a sprawl standpoint, these people would take up a lot less space if they move closer in to the city and their jobs. (By contrast, a condo owner takes up roughly the same amount of space (or even less) in a high-rise in Bethesda or Gallery Place as s/he would in a high-rise at Van Ness).

From a public transit standpoint, encouraging more families to live in close proximity to Metro stations, would give more kids a chance to grow up using subways and busses and walking places. It may substantially decrease those 80% of the car trips that aren't daily work commutes as well as set the next generation off on a less car-dependent course.

From an "attracting new residents" standpoint, here's a niche where DC has the competitive advantage. We still have real residential neighborhoods with room for dense single-family infill that can be incorporated into existing communities. But that kind of infill won't happen if every R-2 or R-5-B

"Smart growth" should be context-sensitive. Not every parcel near a Metro station needs to be zoned for high-rises. That's a suburban model. Density in cities can be achieved in different ways. Let's not abandon our duplexes and rowhouses. They represent real alternatives to single family detached dwellings with big yards. High-rise condos don't.

Sincerely,



Sue Hemberger
5415 42nd St., NW
Washington, DC 20015