



Coalition for Smarter Growth

Choices for our communities, Choices for our region

Testimony before the D.C. Zoning Commission regarding:

In SUPPORT of PUD application
Case No. 05-30 (St. Martin's Apartments)

By Cheryl Cort, Policy Director
January 29, 2007

I am submitting these comments on behalf of the Coalition for Smarter Growth, a decade-old regional non-profit organization. We work to ensure transportation and development decisions are made with genuine community involvement and accommodate growth while revitalizing communities, providing more housing and travel choices, and conserving our natural and historic areas. Today, I speak to you in my new role of Policy Director for the two merged smart growth organizations – the Coalition for Smarter Growth and the Washington Regional Network (WRN). I am providing my comments based my extensive experience as the Executive Director of WRN, where my organization along with the Coalition for Smarter Growth has led affordable housing and smart growth policy reform efforts throughout the region, including the District of Columbia. We have also actively engaged stakeholders supporting and opposing this proposal to understand their concerns, perspectives and aspirations.

The Coalition for Smarter Growth **supports** this PUD application as it offers critically important workforce housing in a city and neighborhood where it is rapidly disappearing. The applicant has revised the proposal over time to respond to nearby residents' concerns regarding how the building will fit into the neighborhood. In particular, we applaud the preservation of the old convent building and architectural designs that replicate surrounding building facades and rowhouse blocks.

This proposal integrates a new building of moderate and low income rental homes close to a robust transit network, and proximity to downtown and hundreds of thousands of jobs. Through securing permanent affordable housing opportunities such as this proposal, we address the critical need to provide more housing for moderate and low wage workers in the core of our increasingly costly region. Housing prices are rising faster than workers' earnings at the middle and low end of the wage scale. Thus housing for moderate income workers is increasingly scarce, causing people who perform essential services in our economy and city to live farther and farther away from their jobs and the communities they serve. Providing more affordable housing accessible to transit, jobs and services is fundamental to ensuring that we protect our environment. At the same time, by offering housing in the right places, like this site, we can guide our region's growth to give residents better housing and transportation choices, and enhance the quality of life of existing communities.

We would like to make few specific comments regarding the proposal.

4000 Albemarle Street, NW, Suite 310
Washington, DC 20016
(202) 244-4408
www.smartergrowth.net

ZONING COMMISSION
District of Columbia

CASE NO. 05-39

EXHIBIT NO. 54

ZONING COMMISSION
District of Columbia
CASE NO.05-39
EXHIBIT NO.54

Affordable Housing Stock

We recognize that some nearby residents are concerned that all the units from the project will be below-market rate. They fear a correlation between crime and below-market rate housing, and some fear that the building could slow rises in property values. Given the rapid changes in this neighborhood, and the mix of mostly moderate and some low income units, we think the proposed new rental homes will not negatively effect the continued rise of market rate housing. The project will serve households earning 60 percent area median income (AMI), or up to \$57,000 annual income for a family of four. This is generally higher than the \$41,000 median family income for this census track, according to the 2000 census. The provision of nearly 200 units of moderate and lower income housing will help ensure that even as the neighborhood housing values continue to rise, those who grew up in the neighborhood or renters who would like to remain might have the option to live here.

The other concern expressed by some nearby residents is that the building could negatively effect the neighborhood's struggle with crime. I think all parties agree that the quality of the management of a building, affordable at any income level, is essential to ensuring the building is a good place to live and a good neighbor. We encourage the applicant to institutionalize its plan to include nearby residents and civic groups in the selection of the professional management company. On-going engagement with neighbors will help identify conflicts and opportunities early so that the building and its residents are good neighbors and fully integrated into the neighborhood.

Transportation Considerations

We strongly support the applicant's separation of housing from parking costs so that renters can pay for parking if they want it, but will not be forced to pay for parking they do not want. Overall, given the site's proximity to transit and downtown, and the low car ownership rates in the neighborhood, even less parking would be appropriate.

According to the 2000 Census, most workers in this area rode transit, walked, carpoled or worked from home to get to work. Only 30 percent drove alone. Forty-two percent of all households in this census tract owned no car. In fact, over 67 percent of renters in this neighborhood did not have access to a vehicle. Thus the proposed parking ratio and pricing to rent parking is an acceptable compromise with some neighbors who have asked for more parking to be provided. Beginning at \$20,000 and moving up to \$50,000 or more per underground parking space, off-street parking comes at a huge cost. The high rate of car-less households in this neighborhood and high rates of commuters who ride transit or otherwise do not drive alone to work demonstrate that providing more parking would needlessly burden housing costs.

Reducing and pricing parking is one of the most important strategies to reduce overall vehicle trips from the site. Also important to reducing the number of vehicle trips is encouraging the use of public transit and bicycling. We recommend the following transportation demand management measures: require the management to designate and train an on-site staff person to provide transit information; provide SmartTrip cards to all tenants and workers; and offer secure and convenient bicycle storage for all residents and workers. In addition, we recommend that the applicant to provide parking spaces for Zipcar or Flexcars at the site for the use of building residents and the surrounding neighborhood. This would also be an amenity to the community.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

*4000 Albemarle Street, NW, Suite 310, Washington, DC 20016
(202) 244-4408 fax: (202) 244-4438
www.smartergrowth.net*

CHERYL A. CORT

1438 Florida Ave, NW
Washington, D.C. 20009

Tel. 202-328-6599
Mobile: 202-251-7516

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Coalition for Smarter Growth (CSG). Washington, D.C. January 2007 – present. WRN and CSG merged in January 2007. The merged organization will carry forward WRN's ongoing programs and focus on equitable development. The merged organization will ensure that transportation and development decisions accommodate growth while revitalizing communities, providing more housing and travel choices, and conserving our natural and historic areas.

Policy Director

- Program responsibilities: advise CSG staff on policy analysis and strategies in the areas of land use, housing and transportation; direct the Equitable Development Campaign to bring the benefits of smart growth to less affluent communities and people.

Washington Regional Network for Livable Communities (WRN). Washington, D.C. October 1998 – January 2007. Through targeted education, policy advocacy and organizing, WRN promotes transportation investments, land use policies, and designs that enhance neighborhoods and protect the environment of the Washington, D.C. region. WRN helps urban communities capture the benefits of smart, equitable growth.

Executive Director (July 2002-2007) / President of the Board (1999-2002) / Board Member (1998-2007).

- Administrative responsibilities: supervise staff of 1.5 FTEs, raise annual budget of \$140,000, expand donor base, develop workplans, recruit board members.
- Program responsibilities: develop programs in transit-oriented development (TOD), alternative transportation and affordable housing that promote smart, equitable growth, with a focus on helping moderate & low income urban communities capture the benefits of smart growth. Steering committee of Campaign for Mandatory Zoning, 2005-present.
- Accomplishments include: Development and adoption of the DC Comprehensive Plan which embraced TOD in 2006, affordable housing goals; adoption of D.C. Inclusionary Zoning program in 2006; major increased commitments to housing trust funds in Alexandria and Fairfax County.

Chesapeake Bay Foundation, Lands Program. Annapolis. October 1998 – June 2002.

Manager, Urban and Regional Projects.

- Developed and supported partnerships and coalitions that, with strategic organizing, advanced land use, transportation, and land conservation objectives.
- Coordinated projects to promote reinvestment in established communities and discourage sprawl-inducing transportation and land use policies in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan region. Projects include: promoting quality transit-oriented development around Metrorail stations; assisting with other regional studies and campaigns including the Northern Potomac Bridge and Freeway and promotion of the Inner Purple Line.

Department of Natural Resources (DNR), State of Maryland. Annapolis. December 1995 - September 1998.

Growth and Resource Conservation Division, Natural Resources Planner IV (1996-1998)

- Assisted with development and implementation of Governor Glendening's 1997 Smart Growth initiatives including Rural Legacy Program and Smart Growth Areas Act.
- Coordinated DNR review of local government comprehensive plans, particularly Sensitive Areas Elements, and implementing ordinances as part of the state assessment of local consistency with the Maryland Planning Act of 1992.

Chesapeake Bay Critical Area Commission, State of Maryland., Natural Resources Planner III (1995)

- Provided technical review of land development projects; assisted local governments with natural resource planning and legal issues pertaining to the protection of the 1000-foot Critical Area around the Chesapeake Bay.

World Resources Institute. Washington, D.C. January 1988 - August 1992.

Program Assistant

- Monitored and assessed the international donor initiative, *the Tropical Forestry Action Plan*. Coordinated grants evaluation process to identify rural forestry-related projects in developing countries that have the capacity to sequester carbon to offset greenhouse gas emissions.

EDUCATION

University of Maryland, College Park

M.S., Sustainable Development and Conservation Biology, December 1994

GPA: 3.83 (out of 4.0). *Emphasis:* Local land use planning for biodiversity conservation.

University of California, Berkeley

B.S., Conservation and Resource Studies, December 1987

GPA: 3.57. *Emphasis:* Natural resource policy in developing countries

University of Delhi, India, University of California Education Abroad Program, 1985-86

COMMISSION AND COMMITTEE APPOINTMENTS

DDOT Great Streets Minnesota Ave. Corridor Advisory Committee 2006-2007

D.C. Dept. of Transportation (DDOT) Great Streets Advisory Committee

D.C. Comprehensive Plan Task Force, 2004-2006

Mayor's Task Force on Parking, 2005

Mayor's Task Force for Downtown Congestion Management Task Force, 2004

D.C. Office of Planning Inclusionary Zoning Work Group, 2003

Mayor's Task Force for Transit-Oriented Development, 2002

VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCE

Chair, Transportation and Parking Committee, Cardozo Shaw Neighborhood Association, Washington, D.C. (2004-present).