

NEIGHBORS FOR A LIVABLE COMMUNITY

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January 31, 2007

RECORDED
DC OFFICE OF ZONING
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Chairman and Members
DC Zoning Commission
441 4th Street, NW
Suite 210 South
Washington, DC 20001

Re: Case # 05-42, Sibley Hospital

Dear Zoning Commissioners:

We urge you to reject the application of Sibley Hospital for permission to build a medical office building in our residentially-zoned neighborhood.¹

1. **When one considers traffic impact, it becomes evident that the proposed structure will be a commercial office building "on steroids."** In addition to the crowd of morning arrivals and evening departures of the regular staff, typical of a normal office building, the proposed building will generate thousands of comings and goings of patients and doctors throughout the day. The applicant's own traffic expert - hardly a model of objectivity - has conceded that over 4600 additional car trips each day will be generated by the new structure - even assuming as he does that a large portion of the workers and visitors use public transportation.

Traffic on Loughboro Road and Nebraska Avenue is already congested during morning and afternoon commuting hours - sometimes extending into the middle of the day because of American University, Ward Circle congestion, and

¹ Our organization has for some 20 years represented residents and neighbors of Spring Valley in connection with developments that are inconsistent with the qualities that have enabled this community to evolve as one of the City's finest residential neighborhoods. Spring Valley and the communities around it - Kent, Palisades, Wesley Heights, etc. - account for a very significant portion of the City's property taxes, because homes in these areas are prized for their attractive and quiet charm while being located close to the City's core. Intensive development pressures are to be expected as the City grows, and this fact makes effective administration of the residential zoning rules critical if these neighborhoods are to continue as valuable assets for the City.

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increased commuting from Virginia via Chain Bridge. During busy times, cars seek to avoid the slow lines by detouring into Spring Valley, on one side, and Kent/Palisades on the other. In Spring Valley, for example, they take Rockwood Parkway or Indian Lane, speeding through otherwise quiet residential streets, to Dalecarlia and thence to Sibley or whatever their destination is. Similar "alternate routes" are used through the other neighborhoods bordering Loughboro Road.

This use of residential streets for quick transit to non-neighborhood destinations will be greatly increased if the proposed Sibley office building and its 4600 additional daily car trips are allowed to come about.

2. There is no demonstrated need sufficient to justify the exception Sibley seeks. A number of well-functioning medical office building exist in this part of the City, including those at Foxhall, at 49th and Massachusetts Ave., and on Wisconsin Avenue. (Sibley officials have told neighbors that one of the large medical buildings on Wisconsin Avenue was being transformed and doctors were being urged to leave. Our investigation, including discussion with the managers of the building in question, showed that this is simply not the case. In fact, once the considerable investment is made to equip a building for doctors' offices, a landlord has a large vested interest in keeping doctors, with their higher rent scale, in the building.)
3. Of course the new building would likely provide a good source of additional revenue for Sibley, but that is certainly not a reason justifying an exception to the zoning rules designed to protect residential neighborhoods. Many private investors would like the privilege of erecting a new office building in a prosperous residential neighborhood, but of course they are not allowed to do so because such a building is inconsistent with the values residential zoning rules are designed to protect. The fact that Sibley is a worthy non-profit institution, and can benefit from additional revenues, is not sufficient to allow it to erect what is basically a commercial medical office building. Sibley is allowed to function as a hospital in a residential neighborhood, but it should not be allowed to engage in commercial real estate development under the cloak of its hospital status.

We appreciate your consideration of these views, and will be please to provide such further information as may be useful.

Sincerely yours,



Robert Herzstein