

Zoning Commission Hearing Concerning the
Giant Site on Wisconsin Avenue
Testimony on Behalf of WIN by Richard Hage

RE: Z.C. Case No. 08-15

April ²³~~6~~, 2009

I represent the Washington Interfaith Network (WIN), a nonprofit corporation with over 45 member congregations in the District of Columbia. From our inception in 1996, we have been out front in demanding public and private investment in neighborhoods and affordable housing.. We of WIN look to the proposed Planned Unit Development (PUD) at the Giant site on Wisconsin Avenue as an opportunity to expand the amount of affordable housing in a neighborhood where it is in woefully short supply.

As the developer, Friendship-Macomb, has pointed out, the PUD guidelines find that the production of housing and affordable housing is a public benefit the PUD process is designed to encourage. In its application for a approval of a planned unit development for the Giant site on Wisconsin Avenue, the developer proposes that eight percent of the residential floor space be for affordable housing, defined as 50 % for households with incomes under 80 percent of the Average Median Income (AMI) and 50% for households under 50% of the AMI for the metropolitan area. *We of WIN applaud the developer's choice of affordable housing as a community benefit. But we strongly urge the Zoning Commission to require more affordable housing and to define "affordable" as being entirely for those households with incomes under \$44,500.*

Through a PUD the city confers significant benefits on a developer. The mayor and the council have pledged to WIN that where there is assistance to a developer, 30 percent of the units will be affordable. Approval of a PUD constitutes such assistance and accordingly we ask that 30 percent, not eight percent, of the

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floor space be set aside for affordable housing. And that affordable be defined entirely as serving the needs of households with incomes of \$44,300 or less. (This is \$4,300 higher than stated in our letter of February 5, 2009 and is close to being 50% of the AMI).

This is an admittedly high bar. But the crisis of lack of affordable housing requires that forceful action be taken. Requiring that developers include affordable housing is, in the opinion of experts, perhaps the only effective tool for assuring an adequate supply of affordable housing. While public resources of all levels of government are critical for meeting this need, they are inadequate in the long run and, as has happened this budget year, housing help for those with lower incomes was among the first items cut by the D.C. Council.

The Housing Task Force, created under the previous D.C. administration, found there was a need for 50,000 units of housing in the District of which 30,000 would need to be affordable to meet the current needs. The shortage of affordable units is particularly severe in Ward 3. We of WIN, and in particular its members in Ward 3--- Chevy Chase Presbyterian, Metropolitan Memorial United Methodist, Blessed Sacrament Catholic, St. Alban's and St. Columba's Episcopal churches, and the Washington National Cathedral---urge the Zoning Commission, in approving this PUD, to require that 30 percent of the housing floor space be affordable for households with incomes of \$44,300 and under.

We have development capacity within our WIN organization and would welcome the opportunity to sit down with the developer and review costs related to increasing the affordability of this project.

Thank you.