

TESTIMONY OF ALLAN I. MENDELSON
BEFORE THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA ZONING COMMISSION
IN SUPPORT OF THE GIANT – STOP & SHOP NEWARK STREET PROJECT
April 23, 2009

I am honored to be allowed to testify before this Commission in support of the proposed plans by Giant and Stop & Shop finally to construct a proper supermarket and accompanying residential and commercial facilities in what has become one of the more depressed and deplorable areas of our neighborhood. I would like to let the Commission know that this is not the first time in which I have made an appearance. I was here with my wife several years ago to support a zoning variance that we had requested for our home, and I am very pleased to say that this Commission held in our favor. So I have great confidence in your continuing good judgment.

I should also like to tell this Commission that my wife and I have lived in our home on Cathedral and 34th Street for what will be 42 years this December. We were once dues paying members of the Cleveland Park Citizens Association, but like dozens of other residents of our community, we purposely let our membership lapse because of the Association's lack of leadership and poor judgment in opposing almost any, indeed almost every, new project that is proposed for our community, including the Giant proposal before the Commission this evening.

Earlier in this testimony, I referred to the "depressed and deplorable" condition of the area surrounding the Giant on Wisconsin and Newark. Years ago, my wife and I used to walk in that area regularly with our three children. Today, we rarely if ever do so, simply because of the increasing number of empty stores on the street not to mention the sad and inadequate state of the Giant store, which we rarely if ever use, even in cases of emergency. We now regularly must use our car to go to the Giant at Van Ness or the Whole Foods in Burleith. We would be totally pleased to see a new and large Giant store built as soon as possible. And we would be equally if not even more pleased to see a four or five story or even higher building that would be both commercial and residential. The area is part of a city not a suburban landscape and is desperately in need of major rehabilitation. We have every reason to believe that Giant's pending plans will succeed in bringing that about.

We are well aware of the entrenched opposition – groups that are always so quick to say "Oh yes, we support the project, BUT. There is always that "BUT". And knowing the opposition in this case, including the huge though largely incomprehensible briefs that are filed for and on behalf of a self appointed very small group of determined opponents, I can say, as did Mr. Lewis in his article in this past Saturday's Washington Post, that this is an opposition that will rarely if ever change its opposition to most forms of civic and city progress despite compelling evidence to the contrary. I sat here very patiently during the last hearing, and I was amazed at the extent of the wasteful cross examination and the reliance on misplaced and irrelevant legalisms. Truly, it was a lesson in how best to delay and oppose progress in our city.

Let me say, on behalf of almost all of the neighbors that I know in the area, and this is by no means a small number, that we are all totally tired of the excessively legalistic arguments about overlays and PUDs. Most of us do not much care what these terms even mean – though

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we are quite certain that our opponents do and will use them for any purpose to support their opposition. All we would like to see, and that we ask of the Commission, is that it act in the best interests of our neighborhood and of this City and that it approve the plans as submitted and as soon as possible so that we can finally begin to see the progress that has been so long delayed by the entrenched though minority opposition in this case. We would like to say to that opposition and as nicely as possible that we have the great pleasure of living in a city and in a city that is forward looking and dynamic. If the opposition in this case continues to prefer and to argue for a low density suburban environment on Wisconsin Avenue, we cannot help but believe they would be much better off living in Poolesville than in a burgeoning city like Washington, DC.