

**District of Columbia Advisory Neighborhood Commission**

**Don Padou**

ANC Commissioner 5A07, Brookland  
1335 Lawrence Street NE  
Washington, D.C. 20017  
(202) 832-4038 email: oulton56@yahoo.com

December 16, 2008

Sharon Schellin, Secretary  
Zoning Commission  
4th Street NW, Suite 200 South  
Washington, D.C. 20001

**Subject: PUD Case Number 08-24**

Dear Ms. Schellin:

For the file/record, enclosed are 5 copies of my comments on the PUD application submitted by Abdo Development, Case No. 08-24.

Sincerely,



Don Padou  
ANC Commissioner 5A07

2009 JAN -5 PM 11:13  
D.C. OFFICE OF ZONING

ZONING COMMISSION  
District of Columbia

CASE NO. 08-24  
EXHIBIT NO. 13

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**Subject: PUD Case Number 08-24**

To the Zoning Commission:

I am writing to provide comments on the PUD application submitted by Abdo Development. I represent ANC 5A07, immediately adjacent to the proposed development. I have had the opportunity to meet with Abdo on several occasions and to provide them with my input.

In some areas they have made improvements that I applaud. In some areas, however, improvements still need to be made.

**Aspects of PUD 08-24 that need improvement:**

- Public Benefits and Project Amenities

Currently, the infrastructure improvements proposed by Abdo as part of the public benefits and project amenities do not include improvements to the Monroe Street bridge. This is a mistake. The Monroe Street bridge connects the proposed development with the Brookland community and, more importantly, with Brookland's commercial corridor on 12<sup>th</sup> Street NE. The bridge is unattractive and dangerous to cross. The sidewalks are narrow, elevated above the roadway, and no railing separates pedestrians from car traffic.

The bridge is a significant physical barrier to Abdo's stated goal of enhancing the connection between Brookland and the new development, specifically their stated goal of attracting customers to the 12<sup>th</sup> Street corridor and helping local businesses to thrive. With cosmetic improvements paid for and implemented by Abdo, the Monroe Street

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The bridge is a significant physical barrier to Abdo's stated goal of enhancing the connection between Brookland and the new development, specifically their stated goal of attracting customers to the 12<sup>th</sup> Street corridor and helping local businesses to thrive. With cosmetic improvements paid for and implemented by Abdo, the Monroe Street

bridge can become inviting and welcoming for pedestrians to cross. In this manner, the local small business owners on 12<sup>th</sup> Street will have a chance of surviving—and possibly thriving—in the face of competition presented by new businesses in the Abdo development.

I have attached a recent article from the Washington Post, *Trapped by Change, Economy*. The article describes how development in Columbia Heights has not helped the businesses in the adjacent Mount Pleasant commercial corridor, as local residents and businesses had hoped. If anything, the Columbia Heights development has harmed these small businesses. We must work to avoid this outcome in Brookland.

Simple improvements would make a world of difference to the ability of 12<sup>th</sup> Street business owners to attract customers from across the bridge. Adding a railing between the sidewalk and the roadway would make walking across the bridge feel less perilous. Widening the sidewalk would be even better. Moving the utility poles that are currently in the middle of the narrow bridge sidewalk would help eliminate an impediment to passage.

**Positive aspects of PUD 08-24:**

- Allocating space along 7<sup>th</sup> Street NE for shuttle buses

There are numerous shuttle buses that travel to and from the Brookland Metro Station, ferrying employees of the hospital center. Unfortunately, the shuttle buses currently follow a long route, via one of two bridges, to the east side of the Metro station. This increases traffic over the bridges, which are traffic bottlenecks that routinely get clogged. Abdo has agreed to allocate space on 7<sup>th</sup> Street NE, on the west side of the tracks, to accommodate the shuttle buses (PUD application p.31). This will reduce traffic pressure on the bridges and on 10<sup>th</sup> Street NE.

- Public Benefits and Project Amenities

The public benefits and project amenities proposed by Abdo do not include payments to local community organizations. This is good news. All too often, developers make payments to local community groups and the money does not lead to any results. The public benefits and project amenities should consist of infrastructure improvements implemented by the developer: tangible improvements that every member of the public can benefit from.

Sincerely,



Don Padou  
ANC Commissioner 5A07

## Trapped by Change, Economy

Advertisement

Mount Pleasant Businesses Struggle to Adjust as Fortunes Sag

By Paul Schwartzman  
Washington Post Staff Writer  
Thursday, November 13, 2008; B01

The palm reader left months ago, as did the laundromat, computer center and two food markets. Across the way, the charred vestiges of a four-story apartment building remain six months after a fire forced 200 low-income residents to move away.

Up and down the commercial heart of Mount Pleasant, the emptiness is a pointed reflection of a broader economic turbulence.

Like many Washington neighborhoods, Mount Pleasant has grown more affluent in recent years, as waves of professionals scooped up rowhouses and condominiums, some paying upward of \$1 million to live just off the 16th Street corridor north of Adams Morgan.

Their arrival has largely meant less business for merchants who have catered to working-class Latino residents who have left the neighborhood, because of the fire or because they sold their houses or were priced out. As storefronts have gone dark, the tightening credit market and floundering economy have made it ever more difficult to start businesses.

"We're in a downward spiral," said Terry Lynch, a Mount Pleasant resident for more than 25 years. He motioned toward a ravaged apartment building and a vacant storefront. "This says, 'Don't bring your business to Mount Pleasant. Go to another neighborhood.'"

Across the city, from Anacostia to upper Georgia Avenue, civic leaders clamor for finer retail establishments and restaurants, a din loud enough that District officials initiated a study this year to figure out ways to lure businesses.

Harriet Tregoning, director of the District's Office of Planning, said merchants in working-class neighborhoods rife with new investment, such as Petworth and Brookland, have struggled to adjust to rising rents and a changing clientele.

"There's a mismatch of what residents want to buy and what is available, and, in some cases, that's because the demographics changed," Tregoning said. "People's demands are higher. They want a better retail experience. They want the windows to be clean. They want to see what's inside the store."

Once a prosperous streetcar suburb whose residents included Sen. Robert LaFollette and legendary Senators fireballer Walter Johnson, Mount Pleasant fell into a steep decline after the 1968 riots, when white homeowners across the city left for the suburbs.

A generation later, homebuyers began returning Mount Pleasant, a migration that gained momentum through the recent housing boom, further diversifying a neighborhood with substantial Latino and black populations.

Mount Pleasant leaders hoped that their commercial strip -- a hodgepodge of beauty salons, fast-food, hardware and liquor stores, and a car repair garage -- would benefit from geography. The strip is three blocks

west of 14th Street in Columbia Heights, where DC USA, a Target-anchored mall, opened this year on a stretch that had been a wasteland since the riots.

Yet, as fortunes have soared in Columbia Heights, Mount Pleasant's have sagged. Along the neighborhood's four-block commercial spine, seven of 40 storefronts have sat empty for four or five months and even longer, including several spacious sites in prominent locations.

In past years, the strip averaged three to four vacancies a year, and those would be occupied within a few months, said Tom Litke, who monitored small businesses across the city as a consultant to the District government from 2004 to 2007.

"I'd be concerned if I was Mount Pleasant," Litke said. "The current businesses need to adjust to the changed market. If the tides change, you have to adjust the sails."

In recent days, workers began renovating one storefront that a laundromat vacated six months ago. They said another laundromat is supposed to open in January. A couple of blocks away, another storefront became vacant Tuesday when a fast-food restaurant was evicted. The vacancies, merchants say, sour the mood along Mount Pleasant Street and hurt remaining businesses.

"There's less flow of people," said Alex Kramer, owner of Dos Gringos, a cafe she opened nine years ago. Since last year, Kramer estimates, her revenue has declined 20 percent.

"If you have all these vacancies and all this darkness, people don't want to come," Kramer said. "No one wants to buy the last cookie."

Yet others see a silver lining in the emptiness. Sean Flynn, 38, a neighborhood homeowner who teaches law at American University, said the strip has long been dominated by "two kinds of establishments -- laundromats and mom-and-pop groceries that sell to" Latinos.

"I love those things, but I don't need 10 of them," he said. "We've always wanted more diversity in the retail. So, frankly, when some businesses close, we're happy."

When Flynn passes a vacant former supermarket on Mount Pleasant Street, he imagines a "really cool, vibey restaurant/bar" or a market that sells cheese, meats and wine.

Not everyone shares his vision of the gourmet life. Alex Maldonado, 35, considers the possibilities for the empty grocery as he hangs out in front the Mount Pleasant Street rowhouse in which he grew up.

"McDonald's," he said. "The food may not be healthy, but it provides a social structure. It's a way to bring people together."

Even if an entrepreneur wants to start a business, the economic realities are daunting. Tom Natan, 48, has scouted Mount Pleasant Street storefronts to open a wine business that he operates online. But he said the rents and the difficulty of obtaining a \$100,000 bank loan have forced him to defer his plans.

"I didn't expect that it would be so difficult to get money," he said.

Mount Pleasant is not the only area feeling the effects of a pinched economy. In Adams Morgan, there are almost a dozen vacant storefronts along Columbia Road and 18th Street, a number described as unusual by Pat Patrick, president of the Adams Morgan Business and Professional Association.

Patrick said he is representing six restaurants seeking rent reductions of as much as 50 percent. "The traffic we're seeing up here has been greatly diminished," he said. "Because of the economy, because of the competition from other areas, we're losing customers."