STATEMENT OF JO-ANN NEUHAUS OF THE PENNSYLVANIA QUARTER NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION BEFORE THE BOARD OF ZONING ADJUSTMENT ON BZA APPLICATION NO. 16596, PROPOSED NEW HOUSING AT 770 5TH STREET, N.W.

Mr. Chairman
~~Madame Chair~~, members of the Board of Zoning Adjustment, ladies and gentlemen, my name is Jo-Ann Neuhaus and I am here today as a representative of the Pennsylvania Quarter Neighborhood Association. The Pennsylvania Quarter neighborhood includes the area of Downtown bounded by 5th Street on the east, G Street on the north, Pennsylvania Avenue on the south, and 10th Street on the west.

The Pennsylvania Quarter Neighborhood Association was created in 1988 by five private developers who were including residences in their developments in the Penn Quarter area and the Pennsylvania Avenue Development Corporation ("PADC"). Since the Association's inception, when I worked at PADC as Director of Project Development and Special Assistant to the Executive Director, I have been deeply involved with the Association's activities.

In 1993, as the area developed, the Pennsylvania Quarter Neighborhood Association voted to open its membership to all in the neighborhood. Today, this growing, voluntary, association has over 100 merchants, restaurants, property owners, hotels, major public institutions, non-profit associations, office tenants, theaters, art galleries, churches, and residential condominium associations among its members. This is certainly one of the few neighborhood associations in the City that is inclusive rather than exclusive.

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I am here today to lend the Association's support to the application of AvalonBay Communities, Inc. for variance relief to develop a 209-unit apartment house at 770 5th Street, NW. This project is consistent with the City's housing goals for the Downtown and will, in fact, help to achieve them. When completed, the residents at AvalonBay's apartment project will contribute to making Downtown a more vibrant community. It will enhance Chinatown, which at the moment has few residents, and its residents are more than likely to be people who will support the arts and retail uses in both Chinatown and Penn Quarter.

I cannot stress how important it is for the city to complete the work that PADC began in the Downtown by facilitating and encouraging new housing development in the Downtown like the AvalonBay project. The recent real estate recession demonstrated how difficult it can become to achieve a critical mass of housing development in the Downtown and the effects this has on the neighborhood's merchants. The recession curtailed development in the Downtown and several Penn Quarter retailers, which served the residential community, could not survive without a larger supporting residential presence. The most significant loss was the Lansburgh Market. When the market leased space in The Lansburgh, the owners anticipated continued development of the Pennsylvania Quarter, including construction of between 500 and 1,000 additional residences on sites both within and adjacent to The Pennsylvania Plan area. When new residential development in the area ceased, the Lansburgh Market could not hold on.

But we have hope that with development of more housing , the neighborhood can again attract retailers who will provide goods and services necessary to maintain a viable residential community.

We now have a burgeoning economy. There is a renewed interest in coming Downtown for relaxation and entertainment. And, of course, there remains keen interest in living in the Downtown, which, unlike most urban neighborhoods, offers its residents and those who work in the area, the opportunity to live in close proximity to major cultural and entertainment uses as well opportunities to participate in community activities and events.

Let us not miss this window of opportunity to provide more housing in the Downtown. AvalonBay's project will add a substantial number of new housing units here. These residential uses will help support essential retail, arts and entertainment uses that serve existing residential uses. The project will benefit the Penn Quarter neighborhood and help to make Washington the world-class city it should be now and in the future.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to present this testimony.