In opposition to BZA appl. #16648 - BP Amoco

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DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
2000 DEC 15 A 8:48

Board of Zoning Adjustment
441 4th Street, NW, Suite 210
Washington, D.C. 20001

November 27, 2000

"Speeding traffic and pedestrian street life are antithetical and incompatible. . . . Streets, and how they function, are the ultimate distinction between a city and a suburb."

Cities Back From The Edge
by Roberta Gratz with Norman Mintz

BZA
Case No. 16648
Exhibit No. 30

Dear Members of the Board,

I want to invite you to come on a little tour with me. We're not going far. In fact, it's so close you could bicycle to it from here--as I often do. But you probably didn't bring your bicycles today, so we'll take the Metro. We'll go just one stop from Judiciary Square to Union Station. Then we'll head out the back way through the parking lot and down the ramp to the H Street overpass.

I know I said it was close-by, but it took us about 5 years to get here. . .We've just passed the crest walking down the south sidewalk going east. A cyclist asks to pass on our left, so we move right. That cyclist knows better than to risk her life on the street itself. Motorists use all six lanes as if it were a raceway.

It is mid-afternoon and the sun is illuminating the north side of the street--so our eyes are drawn there. What is the first thing that catches our attention after the empty building vacated by the Children's Museum, but a whole city block of asphalt and a sidewalk broken every few feet with curb cuts--assuring that no one will walk there--and assuring an urban heat-island effect that promotes the climate change that our addiction to the automobile has catalyzed.

The mini-mart associated with this gas station has role-up night windows similar to those of other merchants on H Street. One brave pioneer had tried to take them down on a couple of buildings he restored back in 2000, but he learned his lesson. The only street life this block-long gas station tends to attract are the drug addicts and dealers who used to hang out around the smaller station that previously occupied this corner.

The trees that were planted for screening succumbed to the urban heat island effect within the first year after planting. Drivers speed by wanting to get past the feeling of nowhere as quickly as possible. What was once a vibrant shopping district has continued to crumble abandonned to

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the automobile for decades to come, if not centuries.

The residents who once used H Street, NE for the bulk of their weekly shopping can just jump in their cars and head on over to Virginia to shop at the big boxes and the malls. That is, those who have cars can go to Virginia. The rest, well, they are too poor to make much noise about their loss anyway.

Members of the BZA, is this the message that you want to send our neighborhoods?

"Whatever people are doing to a downtown to make it more pedestrian-friendly, active and aesthetically appealing and to revive street-oriented activitiy, taming of cars is inevitably involved. More and more people demand it." (Emphasis is the author's.)

Cities Back From The Edge
by Roberta Gratz with Norman Mintz

Now let's start our tour over from the crest of the H Street overpass. Mayor Williams' Year 2000 bicycle plan has reclaimed one lane on either side of the H Street overpass for bicycles, getting them off the sidewalk and slowing traffic a bit. The merchant and resident initiated efforts have reclaimed part of H Street to restore an old streetcar line and this connects seemlessly to the New York Avenue Metro Station. It also slows traffic on the street.

Now, the first thing we see beyond the renovated Children's Museum is a four-story Victorian style structure that mimics the row house architecture for which Capitol Hill is so acclaimed. The first floor is storefront retail with an interesting mixture of shops. The second floor is offices--perhaps medical and dental. The next two floors are residential, serving people who want to be close to jobs, services, Metro and other rail transportation. Most of these urban pioneers have chosen not to own a car since public transportation and services are so convenient. What an ideal location--especially now that H Street has been reclaimed for its residents!

This gateway building has earned a "Platinum Rating" through the LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) rating system. With its green roof, diverse native plant landscape, shared block garden created from all the back yards on the block, largely daylit rooms and excellent indoor air quality, it is a model for the rest of the infill and restoration that is going on along H Street. (This restoration and infill had been happening without the gateway project--through enterprising local entrepreneurs from the neighborhood. The gateway just boosted their efforts.)

People from the Telecom high tech office building at the base of the overpass as well as workers from the North Capitol Corridor gravitate to the gateway at lunch hour and coffee breaks. This stimulates more entrepreneurship, including a demand to widen the sidewalk for sidewalk cafes. This slows the street even more, but former commuters don't mind because they themselves are inclined to stop and take advantage of the street life too. Some of them even find it so appealing that they move back into the city--to these very blocks.

I use these two scenarios to illustrate the fact that the proposed BP Amoco project DOES NOT meet the intent and purpose of the Zoning Regulations and the Comprehensive Plan of the District of Columbia to provide for the health, safety and welfare of the residents AND SHOULD BE DENIED!

Sincerely,

Mary Vogel

Board of Zoning Adjustment
441 4th Street, NW, Suite 210
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It is mid-afternoon and the sun is illuminating the north side of the street--so our eyes are drawn there. What is the first thing that catches our attention after the empty building vacated by the Children's Museum, but a whole city block of asphalt and a sidewalk broken every few feet with curb cuts--assuring that no one will walk there--and assuring an urban heat-island effect that promotes the climate change that our addiction to the automobile has catalyzed.

The mini-mart associated with this gas station has garage door type night windows similar to those of other merchants on H Street. One brave pioneer had tried to take them down on a couple of buildings back in 2000, but he learned his lesson. The only street life this block-long gas station tends to attract are the drug addicts and dealers who used to hang out around the smaller station that previously occupied this corner.

What is this I-95 style truck stop doing here just a few paces from one of the grandest edifices of our city? What does this block-long BP Amoco Station at this gateway location tell you about our priorities for H Street, NE? What was once a vibrant shopping district has continued to crumble abandoned to the automobile for decades to come, if not centuries.

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You can imagine the rest of the story, just as you can imagine the rest of the first scenario. I use them to illustrate the fact that the proposed BP Amoco project DOES NOT meet the intent and purpose of the Zoning Regulations and the Comprehensive Plan of the District of Columbia to provide for the health, safety and welfare of the residents AND SHOULD BE DENIED!

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