Scenic America
National Trust for Historic Preservation

December 7, 2000

Ms. Sheila Cross-Reid, Chair
Board of Zoning Adjustment
441 Fourth St., NW – Suite 210
Washington, DC 20001

REFERENCE: Case # 16648

Dear Ms. Sheila Cross-Reid:

We are writing on behalf of the National Trust for Historic Preservation and Scenic America, two national organizations dedicated to preservation of community character, to oppose the current BP Amoco proposal to build a block-long gas station in the 300 block of H St., NE. Both of us live in the District of Columbia and are familiar with the site in question. Ms. Maguire is a resident of Capitol Hill and attended the October Stanton Park Neighborhood Association community meeting where a team of lawyers and BP officials presented their proposal.

BP proposes to build a standard suburban gas plaza with a 24 hour, seven day mini-mart surrounded by parking; 28 gas pumps; a car wash; and a block-long, brightly lit canopy. This site plan poses hazards for pedestrians, disrupts potential revitalization of this urban commercial street, and conflicts with adjacent residences. While BP has made certain design modifications in light of community criticism – additional landscaping, a monument sign, brick cladding for the mini-mart, and a slimmer canopy – their overall concept is still completely out of character with the Capitol Hill and H St. Corridor communities.

The proposed station is inappropriate for the edge of an historic district that borders our nation's Capitol. Furthermore, it is totally incompatible with the careful restoration of other properties in the neighborhood including the residential streets on both sides of H St.; the Capitol Children's Museum; the commercial buildings which David Schwartz has so superbly renovated at 300 I St., NE, in the 200 I St. block and the Railway Express Building; and the new, well-designed mixed-income single-family housing on several streets just off the H St. Corridor.

In addition, a gigantic auto-oriented facility is not the best use of this prime site. Capitol Hill and the H St. Corridor are highly desirable transit oriented neighborhoods, accessible to an unusual network of public bus and rail lines. A better use of this land would be for retail commercial or office use which could take full advantage of this location. *Simply stated, the project BP proposes is the wrong project in the wrong place at the wrong time.*

However, we do understand that BP can develop the property by right as a gas station.

BZA
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Board of Zoning Adjustment
District of Columbia
CASE NO.16648
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We have visited the property and wish to comment on the proposed site plan in hopes that, if the station does proceed, the Board of Zoning Adjustment will insist that BP incorporate our suggestions in their design to mitigate the impact of this facility:

1. Relocate the mini-mart to the front of the site at the corner of 4th St.

   We recommend that BP move the mini-mart out of the center of the property and locate it at the corner of 4th St. fronting on the sidewalk. This would continue the building line along half of the block. The mini-mart would be accessible by a main entrance from H St. and a side entrance from the parking area in the middle of the block.

2. Redesign the mini-mart as a building that will add distinction to H St. The current plan calls for a typical gas station with the commercial facility at the center of the site, surrounded by cars and parking. However, there is a great opportunity here to build a really fine building that could contribute to the revitalization of this long-neglected commercial street.

3. Eliminate the car wash. A car wash is incompatible with the nearby homes as it will generate noise and light pollution that does not belong in the neighborhood.

4. Scale back the number of pumps and concentrate them at the 3rd St. end of the site. Twenty-eight gas pumps is far too many for this site.

5. Break up the size of the canopy. The proposed canopy is disproportionately long and bright for this location. Instead of one long canopy, a set of short unlit canopies designed with respect for the historic architecture would be more suitable.

6. Strictly control the lighting to minimize glare and ambient night light in the community. Lighting design should minimize light pollution for neighboring houses and businesses.

7. Abate noise at the site. The residential area on the north side of the block deserves to be fully protected from the noise and activity generated by a non-stop traffic generator such as this.

8. Heavily landscape a buffer zone adjacent to the residences to provide a visual screen.

BP – "beyond petroleum" – has positioned itself as an environmentally friendly international corporation which respects the principles of sustainability in all aspects of its business. Being a good neighbor through one's physical presence in the community is an important and often overlooked aspect of corporate environmental and social responsibility. We suggest that the project at 3rd and H presents an opportunity for BP to show that it understands that being a good neighbor is also part of being a good corporate citizen.

We urge the Board of Zoning Adjustment to require BP to commission a good contextual design for this site in consultation both with the neighborhood and with design professionals who

have experience in context-sensitive building design. We believe that this site presents an opportunity to build an exemplary new urban prototype gas station in the nation's capital that will serve the community and be a credit to BP. If BP agrees to work with the neighborhood groups to design a facility that fits in exceptionally well with the community, then we offer to be a part of the process and to give full recognition through our national networks for design excellence.

However, if BP fails to agree to an appropriate facility as we have outlined then we recommend that the Board of Zoning Adjustment deny this application.

Sincerely,

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