Historic Takoma, Inc.
Testimony for the DC Board of Zoning Adjustment
Presented by Loretta Neumann, Vice President
February 12, 2002
Re: BZA Application Number 16833
Lot 26, Square 3354, 306 Carroll Street, NW, Washington, DC

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I am Loretta Neumann, Vice President of Historic Takoma, Inc. and co-chair of its Takoma DC Historic Preservation Committee. I reside at 7124 Piney Branch Rd., NW. Historic Takoma, Inc. is a membership-based non-profit organization founded in 1979 to promote historic preservation, citizen involvement, and community development for the Takoma community in Washington, DC and Takoma Park, MD.

We applaud the Mr. Russell Katz for undertaking to develop this important but complex and problematic property. We have worked with him over the past year to assure that the design and use of his building will be compatible with the historic district. In this regard we twice presented testimony before the DC Historic Preservation Review Board (HPRB). We have made many requests of Mr. Katz, and have been pleased with his willingness to make numerous changes that we sought. We note too that his building is well within the zoning requirements for height and floor area ratio, and it exceeds the requirement for parking. His commitment to environmental sustainability, energy conservation and storm water management is also exceptional.

Significance of the Property

The significance of this property as a linchpin for development in Takoma DC cannot be over stated. This site, located immediately across from the Takoma Metrorail Station, is at the hub of the Takoma Central District revitalization area. It is also an important link between the east and west portions of the historic district, which is bisected by the railroad tracks. This is the first major development directly adjacent to the Takoma Metro Stop in nearly 3 decades. The lot itself has been eyesore for most of that time. Mr. Katz's building will provide a critically needed presence, a gateway to the Takoma neighborhood on both sides of the Metrorail tracks

Position of Historic Takoma

I am therefore pleased to testify on behalf of Historic Takoma, Inc. **in support of this application for a special exception from the limitation on the number of roof structures and the roof structure setback requirements and for a variance from the residential recreation space requirements.**

As with our testimony before the HPRB, we have studied the application closely. We again visited the site to review the impacts of the proposed zoning variance and special exception. We agree that the special problems associated with this lot (its odd shape, difficult access, challenging slope, and proximity to the railroad) justify these relatively minor requests for relief from the zoning requirements.

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Indeed, these are the kinds of problems ("exceptional topographical conditions or other extraordinary or exceptional situation or condition of a specific property") for which the zoning code envisions a variance and for which the public's interest will be served. And the exception sought for the roof top structures will, in fact, be "in harmony" with the zoning regulations and "not tend to affect adversely the use of neighboring property."

Issue of Bike Trail

It has come to our attention that one of the proponents of the Metropolitan Branch Bicycle Trail has objected to this development. However, neither the requested zoning variance nor the exception would directly affect the issue of the trail. Over the course of the last few years, there have been ongoing discussions within the Takoma DC community regarding the merits and problems of a number of possible bicycle routes, only one of which would pass through this site. Many Takoma citizens of both DC and Maryland prefer other routes. Indeed, three other trail routes are being studied, and no final route has been selected. To our knowledge, no concrete steps have been taken towards adoption or construction of this option as opposed to the others.

Regardless of what decision is made on the trail alignment, we do not believe this bicycle trail option should delay or preclude viable development of Mr. Katz's property, so critical to the future of Takoma.

Thank you for this opportunity to provide comments.