COUNCIL OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

WASHINGTON, D.C 20001

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Mr. Geoffrey Griffis, Chair
Board of Zoning Adjustment
441 4th Street, NW Suite 220
Washington DC 20001

RE: BZA Case No. 16836 (The Washington Home)

Dear Mr. Griffis:

I am writing with regard to the special exception application of the Washington Home at 3720 Upton Street, N.W. I urge that the Board grant the application to construct an addition to accommodate four new beds. The Home has a reputation for providing excellent care, and the additional beds are needed. I do not perceive that the addition will have any adverse impact on the residential zone district.

However, I urge that the Board deny the application to expand the on-site parking lot to permit a 130% increase in parking spaces. In this regard I am aware of both the neighbors' and ANC 3-F's concerns. I am familiar with this issue as I was ANC Commissioner in 1985 when the Home's current special exception was granted, and my SMD joined the Home's property.

The Washington Home has always enjoyed general support from its surrounding community. However, the one contentious, and extremely difficult issue in the 1985 case concerned parking versus the preservation of open, green space. The bargain struck in the course of the BZA process was that the Home would have a smaller parking lot than authorized in the Zoning Regulations. The desire for green space was paramount.[1]

Revisiting that 1985 case has an unfortunate ring because it suggests that institutional plans and commitments in residential zones have no permanency; that limits are merely toeholds to be enlarged later.

With regard to the parking needs of its employees and visitors, I am not aware that The Washington Home has taken any steps to encourage alternative travel modes – and thereby limit vehicle trips – including transit, car pooling, and shuttle service. The Home is one block from the half-dozen "30" and "H" bus routes on Wisconsin Avenue; it is nearly equidistant from the Tenley-

[1]I recall specific testimony where Ms. Ruth Dixon (former ANC 3F chair, Upton Street resident, and 1986 candidate for City Council) and others made clear that even with extensive landscaping and berms, a larger parking lot was simply unacceptable.

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town and Van Ness Metrorail stations. Moreover, while the Home has complained to me about employees of the nearby U.S. Post Office[2] taking up significant on-street parking, I have been left alone to work with the USPS to mitigate its parking demands.

The Ward 3 Element to the Comprehensive Plan supports not enlarging the parking lot:

> *"Land use in Ward 3 must be sensitive to the retention of green space, compatible in use and scale, and respect the environmental qualities of public lands. In the decision-making to approve development proposals, there shall be a presumption that open space land should be provided." 10 DCMR § 1409.7(a)*

Other Ward 3 Plan provisions are consistent – e.g., "...minimize regrading or the removal of topsoil and vegetation" (10 DCMR § 1406.5(b)(5)).

If the District is to be serious about improving its environment,[3] then it cannot continue to promote the auto dependance of institutions and large tract users. I am, here, suggesting nothing more radical than what is found in another provision of the Ward 3 Comprehensive Plan Element:

> *"(a) The District government should do the following: ...(3) Encourage institutional and large corporate residents to promote public transit usage and discourage employee reliance on single-occupant vehicles; this should be a condition when possible in connection with discretionary governmental approvals."* (10 DCMR 1403.5 – Improving air quality objective and policies)

The 1985 BZA approval regarding The Washington Home's parking was significant because it was an unusual example of the zoning process placing aesthetics and environment above automobiles. I urge that you not unravel what was done, and that as you consider the proposed 130% increase before you, you consider this additional provision of the Ward 3 Plan: *"All discretionary construction approvals should be conditioned on an affirmative answer to the question: does the proposed project provide a net gain for the ward environmentally?"* (10 DCMR § 1403.7(b)).

Sincerely,

Phil Mendelson
Councilmember At-Large

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[2]Which happens to be a tenant on land owned by The Washington Home.

[3]Earlier this month the National Capital Region Transportation Planning Board released preliminary data estimating that auto emissions are 30% greater than permitted under the District's federally-required air quality plan, and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency proposed "bumping up" the District's non-attainment status from "serious" to "severe."