TESTIMONY OF CATHY WISS
COMMISSIONER, ANC 3F06

BZA CASE NO. 16836, THE WASHINGTON HOME

OCTOBER 15, 2002

My name is Cathy Wiss. I reside at 3810 Albemarle Street, N.W., and represent Single Member District 3F06, which includes affected residents across from The Washington Home in the 3700 and 3800 blocks of Upton Street, as well as on 38th Street, N.W. I will address the physical and visual impact of the proposed parking lot.

Let's look at the current parking lot and compare it with what The Home proposes to do. The current parking lot, set at an angle to the building and the surrounding streets, follows the natural grade of the property. Its curved outline makes it blend into the landscape. Along Upton Street it is hidden from view by a berm. A very generous setback minimizes its impact on the corner and on 37th Street. Extensive and varied landscaping within the lot and around the edges makes this seem more like a woodland setting than a parking lot. Even though this lot is exposed to the surrounding homes and streets, rather than tucked behind the building like most lots in our area, all of these factors make it relatively unobtrusive.

In contrast, the proposal would resemble a shopping center parking lot – a stultifying swath of asphalt the size and shape of a football field spread across the landscape, obliterating trees and covering over large areas of green space with impervious surface, most noticeably for the community, the pleasant lawn rolling down toward 37th Street and the corner. Because of the descending slope of the parking lot, no amount of shrubs and flowering trees could hide the fact that it would be there, especially when viewed from houses across Upton Street, which are on a rise,[1] and from second floor windows of houses along 37th Street. Even from the street, it would be visible except where hidden by the berm along Upton Street, as shown in the north elevation of the site at Tab 7 of the Application.

In fact, many of the parking spaces would be much closer to nearby properties than to The Home itself, making this design not only intrusive to nearby residents, but inconvenient to users of the lot. Often I have seen spaces on the outside of the current lot vacant while cars are bunched two and three deep near the doors.[2] No wonder – these spaces are hundreds of feet from the doors! My hunch is that the outer spaces in the proposed lot, even farther from the doors than the least desirable spaces now, would hardly be used.

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[1] An idea of this rise in elevation can be gained from Picture #2 at Tab 3 of the Application, which was taken from 37th Street just north of Upton Street.

[2] There are two main entrances to the facility: the front door at the Upton Street driveway and a back door by the 37th Street driveway, used mainly by employees.

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I would like now to discuss the impact of the proposal on several of the features in and around the Home's property.

The Cupola

Please turn to picture #1, the Cupola at the corner of Upton and 37th Streets. The cupola, nestled in a grove of crape myrtles and framed by larger deciduous trees, was a memorial gift. The bench and gardens surrounding it also were donated. Perhaps this small shrine is enjoyed by neighborhood residents, but I can say with certainty that it is an important feature for visitors to The Home. The first time I tried to take this picture, a young couple was standing beside the cupola, heads together, his arm on her shoulder. At first I thought of romance, but then they turned and strolled quietly, hand in hand, through the grand sycamores and poplars along Upton Street to The Home's entrance. See picture #2. It was then that I realized they were probably visiting someone dear, someone very sick, and needed a place to gather their thoughts. The next time I went to take this picture, a man of about 60 and a younger man – perhaps a father and son? – were standing in the same spot. The older man, his foot propped on the bench and leaning on his knee, was talking earnestly with the younger man. As their conversation ended, they, too, returned to the Home.

But what would this place of solace and reflection be like if this parking lot is built only 12 feet away, as is shown on several of the plans? That is about the distance from where you are sitting to where I am sitting. The crape myrtles and birches would be removed and replaced with a rise crowned with asphalt and car bumpers;[3] the calls of birds exchanged for sounds of rolling tires, opening and closing doors, grinding ignitions, chance conversations. The cupola would become nothing more than an odd ornament anchoring the end of the parking lot.

The removal of the grove of crape myrtles, too, would be a serious loss, even if the trees could be transplanted. Not only is the grove an attractive feature to look at, it is wonderful to stroll under. The boughs form interlocking arches like a breezy Gothic cathedral, a perfect complement to the cupola.

As for the stately tall trees that now frame the cupola, a 20" dbh. maple on the right would probably not survive the construction, nor would a magnificent 40" dbh. poplar further along Upton Street. Any sort of construction activity within the critical root zones of these trees, including trenching for pipes or planting new shrubs and trees, could put any of these large trees at risk. I disagree with The Home's landscape architect, Liling Tien, that the critical root zones of these trees would be outside the construction area. She testified that this 40" tree has a critical root zone of 60 feet in *diameter*, i.e., 30 feet in radius, that would have to be protected. (June 25 transcript at 172) Although I am

[3] The grading plan seems incomplete and inconsistent. My guess is that the parking lot would have to be elevated at least 4 feet above the ground surrounding the cupola and bench.

not an expert, arborists I have worked with on other zoning cases have always measured the critical root zone as a *radius,* as does the "Urban Forest Preservation Act of 2001", which the D.C. Council has been considering.[4] According to this standard, a circle with a radius of 40 feet around this tree would have to be protected. This is not being done here. The proposed parking lot would be well within this tree's critical root zone.

The same can be said for the stand of white pines along 37th Street, shown in picture #3. The parking lot would go along the right side of this picture, very close to the trees on the right, cutting their roots and endangering them, too. I should note that in the Application a berm is proposed for this side of the parking lot, although The Home's witnesses did not discuss it at the June 25 hearing. Were this berm to be built, it is highly likely that critical roots of some of these trees, as well as some trees nearer the cupola, would be compacted by fill placed on top of them. This action would hasten their demise.

The soaring canopy of the trees along 37th and Upton Streets, shown from a different angle in picture #4, can be seen and enjoyed by neighbors for blocks around and from rooms and the terrace of The Home, as well. I know that when I have been hospitalized, a view of trees like these has sustained me and made me forget my pain. With so many trees on this site removed and others endangered, this important benefit for residents of the Home would undoubtedly be diminished.

Stands of Trees around the Parking Lot

The plans show that about 50 trees within and around the parking lot are slated to be destroyed. Others would be transplanted. The next several pictures show how this would affect the lot. In Picture #5, a grove of trees in the right center would be removed and transplanted elsewhere. Picture #6 shows white pines and maples in the southeast corner that would be taken out and discarded. In Picture #7, taken from the terrace of the Home, only the magnolia in the foreground would remain. All the other trees behind it and the tall ones just beyond the cars would be removed. All of these plantings in small niches of the existing parking lot make it an unusually attractive place. The proposed parking lot would have no such niches.

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[4] Bill 14-307 defines the "critical root zone" of a tree as "the area immediately surrounding a tree that extends one foot for each diameter inch measured at breast height". Section 103 (10) (Committee Print, March 20, 2002) "Endangered tree" is defined as "a tree whose critical root zone, all or in part, is within a construction area". *Id.* Section 103 (13). If construction cuts for the proposed parking lot were about five feet behind the finished edge of the parking lot in order to construct footings for curbs and retaining walls, construction activity would be 26 feet from this 40" tulip poplar; 14 feet from a 28" sycamore; 7 feet from the 20" maple; 15 feet from a 23.5" white pine; 11 feet from a 21" white pine.

The Landscaped Island

In the middle of the current parking lot is a long island landscaped with 7 Armstrong maples and two dogwoods. It shades the cars, as seen in Picture #8, looking north. It extends the canopy across the parking lot to give the impression of forest and continuous green space leading from the neighborhood up to The Home, while cars and asphalt are hidden underneath, as seen in Picture # 9, looking southeast from the Upton Street entrance; and in Picture #10, looking east from the Home's terrace. It screens the view of the Home from the street, as seen in Picture #11 looking west from 37th Street.

Landscaping within a parking lot has been used successfully in other parking lots in our area, such as at the Washington Clinic, where an island with trees and a hedge makes the 62-car lot seem half the size and hides the building, see Picture #12, and the local Safeway, Picture #13. The 112-space Safeway lot, like the Home's lot, was built in the 1980s on the site of a former building. The islands of oaks make the lot pleasant for shoppers and shade the cars.

For good reason the Zoning Code requires that "landscaping with trees and shrubs shall cover a minimum of five percent (5%) of the total area of the parking lot". 11 DCMR Section 2303.1 (a)(f). The proposed parking lot has only a handful of trees dotting the ends of long rows, where there is not enough room for more parking spaces. Although Ms. Dickeson testified that the interior green space of the proposed lot would amount to 7% (June 25 Transcript at 52-53), I cannot see how the small wedges allocated to green space at the ends of these rows could amount to so much, unless the larger island in the circle by the Upton Street door is included. While technically within the parking lot, this island provides no real benefit for it. That is because *where* and *how* interior landscaping is placed also makes a difference. These lone sentinel trees would be rhythmically placed, out of tune with the free-flowing natural landscape along the streets. Only a few cars would benefit from their shade. Relegated to the ends of the lot, they would provide no visual interest for residents of The Home or neighbors, nor would they offer relief from the large black hole in the center of the lot.

This view would be particularly severe for residents of The Home. Because The Home is elevated above the lot, as you are above the hearing room, views from The Home are directed to things in the distance rather than to things close up. This proposal would place rows of parking at just that distant spot most easily seen from The Home, the parking lot extension along 37th Street. Rather than the soothing greenery they now enjoy, residents of The Home would get a bird's eye view of asphalt and cars, unimpeded by trees in an island – an unattractive view, an intrusion on neighbors, an inconvenient place to park.

The District's Comprehensive Plan for Ward 3 lists "protection of [the ward's] healthful verdancy" and "encouragement of design solutions that promote both conservation and improvement of the ward's resources" as environmental goals for Ward

3. 10 DCMR Section 1403.3. To protect the quality of the ward's land areas, the plan specifies that

> 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 Section 1403.7 (b).

> The answer is "no" for this proposed parking lot.

Additional Landscaping Near 38th Street

I would like to add that in looking over The Home's property, the ANC found that little attention has been paid to landscaping along the 38th Street side of the building, which is highly visible to residents of 38th and Upton Streets. Picture #14 shows a view of the Home from 38th Street. If you do decide to grant a special exception, we ask that The Home be obligated to provide more hospitable landscaping along its 38th Street façade.

Thank you.



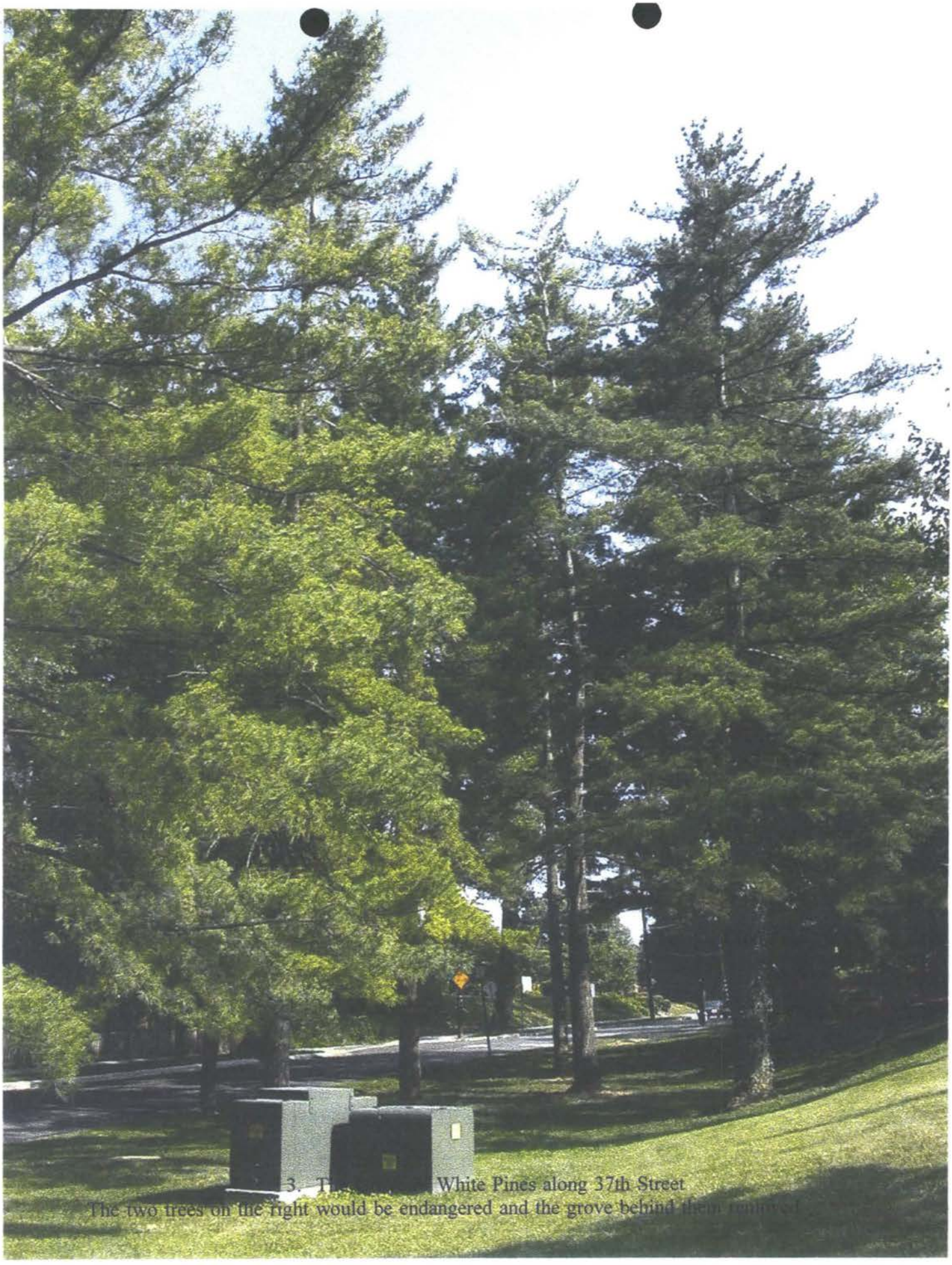
1. The Cupola

A memorial gift facing the corner of Upton and 37th Streets enjoyed by neighborhood residents and visitors to the Home



2. The Cupola and Stand of Trees along Upton Street

The proposed parking lot would surround the cupola on its north and west sides and come to within 11 feet of it. The groves of crapemyrtles and birches behind the cupola would be removed. A 20" diameter maple just to the right of the cupola would be endangered, as would a 40" poplar and 28" sycamore further to the right.



3. [illegible] White Pines along 37th Street
The two trees on the right would be endangered and the grove behind them removed



4. The Soaring Canopy of Sycamores and Poplars along Upton Street

These trees can be seen and enjoyed for blocks around, as well as from rooms and the terrace of the Home.



5. Stand of Trees along the North Side of the Parking Lot

Plans call for removing the trees in the right center of the picture.



6. White Pines and Maples in the Southeast Corner

Plans are to take these out.



7. The View from the Home's Terrace

Only the magnolia in the foreground will remain. The tall maples in the background also will be removed.



8. The Landscaped Island -- Looking North

The 7 maples and 2 dogwoods shade cars and help cool the surrounding area.



9. The Landscaped Island -- Looking Southeast from Upton Street Driveway

The island extends the canopy across the parking lot giving the impression of a forest rather than cars and asphalt.



10. The Landscaped Island -- Looking East from the Home's Terrace

The island gives a feeling of continuous green space for residents of the Home.



11. The Landscaped Island -- as Seen from 37th Street

The tall canopy of the island hides the view of the Home's building.



12. The Washington Clinic, 5401 Western Avenue, N.W.

An island with trees and a hedge makes this 62-car parking lot seem half its size and hides the building.



13. Safeway Parking Lot, 4203 Davenport Street, N.W.

This 112-space lot, like the Home's parking lot, was built in the 1980s on the site of a former building. The islands of oaks make the lot pleasant for shoppers and shade the cars.



14. View of The Washington Home from 38th Street, N.W.

More attention should be paid to landscaping this side of the Home.