WASHINGTON REGIONAL NETWORK
FOR LIVABLE COMMUNITIES

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D.C. ZONING COMMISSION
JUL 22 PM 1:01

July 22, 2002

Geoffrey Griffis
Chairman, D.C. Board of Zoning Adjustments
441 4th Street, NW, Suite 210 South
Washington, DC 20001

RE: 16901 - Application of The Most Worshipful Prince Hall Grand Lodge, pursuant to 11 DCMR § 3104.1, for a special exception to permit accessory parking spaces under section 214, in an R-4 District at premises 1906 Vermont Avenue, NW (Square 333, Lots 824 and 825)

Dear Chairman Griffis:

We ask that you deny this application, but provide guidance on parking and transportation demand management for the Prince Hall Grand Lodge access needs. We request that D.C. Office of Planning and DC Department of Transportation provide better guidance on more cost-effective ways to meet the access needs of businesses and institutions while also meeting broader community, city and regional goals.

The existing and proposed surface parking lots are only one of many ways to address the access needs of the Prince Hall Grand Lodge building at the 12th Street exit of the U Street Metrorail station. The surface parking lots are also likely to be both the most cost-ineffective way to provide access for use of the Prince Hall Grand Lodge building, and most detrimental to the neighborhood.

Surface parking lots are a significant problem throughout much of the city. Many single use parking lots – especially for churches -- remain underutilized for much of the week. These vehicle storage lots have many negative effects on the neighborhood – empty spaces in the neighborhood create a less pedestrian-friendly environment, making walkers and residents feel less comfortable and safe; and such a passive land use displaces housing opportunities in a neighborhood with tremendous demand and escalating prices. According to research in the field of "crime prevention through environmental design," vacant lots, blank walls, parking garages and parking lots

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Exhibit No. 33

Board of Zoning Adjustment
District of Columbia
CASE NO.16901
EXHIBIT NO.33

enclosed by chain link fences are correlated with higher incidents of crime than similar places with pedestrian-oriented buildings and streetscapes.

Single use surface parking is an extremely inefficient use of urban land and resources. Alternatives to surface parking lots as a means of providing access to businesses are likely to be more cost-effective and provide greater benefits to both the business/institution and to the neighborhood. Given the inefficiencies and neighborhood-degrading aspects of surface parking lots, alternative strategies should be strongly encouraged for meeting the access needs of businesses and institutions in the neighborhood.

The planned Parking Demand Management Study for the 14th & U Streets Business District should address issues such as the number and types of users of parking and all other modes (employees, night time visitors, people with disabilities, etc.) and types of uses – long term versus short term. A demand management study examines not only what modes are used now, but how changed incentives would change preferences for different modes.

In anticipation of a Parking Demand Management Study, we suggest the following questions for addressing the access needs for the Prince Hall Grand Lodge activities:

1. What parking facilities exist nearby? [i.e. Housing Finance Agency parking garage, Reeves Center parking garage, Public Welfare Foundation surface parking lot, Howard University] What are the possibilities of sharing these facilities to meet the Prince Hall Grand Lodge needs (especially special event needs)? What would be the cost to use them? What obstacles need to be overcome to share underutilized parking facilities?

2. What would valet parking service to and from such parking facilities cost? Note: the advantage of valet parking is that patrons who have difficulty walking or fear for their safety could be dropped off in front of the building rather than walking to the existing/proposed Prince Hall Grand Lodge parking lots.

3. What would a taxicab fare program cost to subsidize patrons' trips to the building from home? Would subsidized transit fares make transit use more attractive to some patrons?

4. Can cash be provided in lieu of free parking so that the uncounted cost of free parking can be converted to a subsidy equally shared by all patrons regardless of mode of access (i.e. drive, transit, walk, drop off, cab)?

5. What are the opportunity costs of maintaining the surface parking lots as parking lots rather than developing them for their designated use -- housing -- and providing funds for an alternative access strategy to the Prince Hall Grand Lodge building? Could the development of the parking lots provide sufficient funds to support an effective alternative access strategy for the Prince Hall Grand Lodge's needs? Could development of housing at these sites also provide shared parking facilities for Prince Hall Grand Lodge needs?

Thank you for your consideration

Sincerely,

Cheryl Cort
Executive Director

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FAX COVER SHEET

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FROM: Cheryl Cort
Executive Director

DATE: 7/22/02.

SUBJ: BZA application #16901 - Prince Hall Grand Lodge

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