

November 14, 2018

Mr. Frederick Hill, Chair
Board of Zoning Adjustments
District of Columbia
441 4th Street, NW, Suite 2005
Washington DC 20001

RE: Support for BZA Case 19823 – 3920 Alton Place, NW, applicants: Wisconsin Ave. Baptist Church & Sunrise Senior Living

Please accept these comments on behalf of the Coalition for Smarter Growth. The Coalition for Smarter Growth is the leading organization in the Washington, DC region dedicated to making the case for smart growth. Our mission is to promote walkable, inclusive, and transit-oriented communities, and the land use and transportation policies and investments needed to make those communities flourish.

We support the proposed special exceptions and variances proposed by Wisconsin Avenue Baptist Church. We believe that the proposed project is an appropriate reuse of the current underutilized site and obsolete church building. It will bring a set of compatible and complementary uses to the neighborhood, close to a Metro station, bus lines, stores, institutions, and services.

The proposed project gives new life to a religious use, enabling this church or its successor to continue to serve their members and the community. The project also offers a new mission – to provide assisted living for older adults and memory care. As DC's and the United States' population ages, we need to consider how we can appropriately accommodate more facilities like this one.

The Baptist Church site is an appropriate site, given the careful design and configuration of the joint use for the church and continuing care retirement community (CCRC). The building will conform to the 40 foot height limit, but adapt of the building envelope by using four instead of three stories to provide 86 continuing care units. Given this special kind of residential use, we think it reasonable to provide the requested flexibility for this application.

In addition to sensitive design, the contiguous National Park Service (NPS) offers both a buffer for the project's 57% lot occupancy, and a de facto side yard. The entire Tenleytown community also benefits from the project's adjacency to NPS land given the applicant's plans for landscaping and enhanced public park space features where now only underutilized passive open space exists. The project pulls back from its east side neighbors and provides landscaping and fencing to provide privacy and screening.

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The site is close to the Tenleytown Metro station, major bus routes, services and other destinations. The accessibility to the site will primarily benefit workers who will have a variety of transportation choices and local services. Accessibility could also benefit family members visiting loved ones. The project could further enhance the benefit of the site's proximity to transit by offering employees more generous transit benefits equivalent to the value of the parking benefit they are likely to receive. Also, the CCRC could offer discounted corporate Capital Bikeshare memberships to staff to encourage bicycle commuting and travel. At minimum, the project will offer pre-tax transit benefits to employees, per DC law, and could promote transit, bike and walk access to the site to its employees and visitors.

We support this project given the need by Wisconsin Avenue Baptist Church to renew its outmoded facility for religious uses. We support the project because it is sensitively designed, requiring only modest relief from zoning requirements. We support the project because we believe it is important to provide assisted living and memory care for DC and DC area families, which is permitted in the R zone as a special exception. The site is highly accessible to transit and services, and enhances the adjacent public space for the public.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Cheryl Cort', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Cheryl Cort
Policy Director