

November 14, 2018

Testimony to the BZA

Glenn Williamson

4407 38th Street NW

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before the BZA regarding Application 19823 for
Wisconsin Avenue Baptist Church and Sunrise Senior Living.

I have lived in Tenleytown for the past 15 years at the corner of Alton Street NW and 38th Street NW, approximately one and one-half blocks south of the property in question. I am an Assistant Professor at Georgetown University and serve as the Faculty Director for Georgetown's Masters in Real Estate Program.

My home was built in 1923. Wisconsin Avenue Baptist Church has been here since 1924. The Church is a neighbor. They have been here a long time and their needs have changed so they now wish to redevelop their property in conjunction with Sunrise.

The Church's strategy is not uncommon. Throughout the DMV region, there are many religious groups who want to improve their facilities and use their property to serve new purposes by combining senior living and/or affordable housing options. Students in our Masters in Real Estate program have worked on a volunteer basis with Prince George's County officials to evaluate a number of similar projects.

I understand that this new project will have the greatest impact on its immediate neighbors, and of course they should have the most say; but since there is a petition circulating in the broader community I wanted to offer some suggestions as a member of the broader community.

The Church is seeking a variance to build up to their western lot line, which ends next to grassy lawn owned by the National Park Service and the public right of way along Nebraska Avenue. Why is building to the street lot line a problem? The front steps of every one of our homes along Alton Street are built to the edge of the public right of way. My house and every house around me uses the right of way as our front lawns. The Church and Sunrise would be doing the same.

The reason they need the variance is that they shifted their proposed building 8 feet further away from the immediate neighbors on 39th Street NW. This allows for a new landscaped buffer between the new building and the existing homes. The plan shows evergreen trees; but the height of the trees is the critical factor. I would suggest that the Church specify a sufficient height of the trees and even commit to install them in as early as possible during the construction process to provide the greatest buffer.

There is not much distance between any of our homes. Trees are what provide each of us with privacy and a buffer between our homes. Trees can provide the same benefit between the Church and its neighbors.

There have been concerns raised about the use of Alton Street by delivery trucks and a shuttle van. The sunrisewrongsite.com website says that 20 truck trips each week might be added to the traffic flow. That would mean 3 trips a day. Is that really a problem? We already have small school buses which come twice a day during the school year and larger busses for the camp pick up which come by during the summer. My sons used to ride them. I never heard a complaint about them. Metro Access vehicles use our streets and no one minds. How different is this?

Ambulances might come. But we have ambulances now that come from time to time. How is it different? There will certainly be more traffic, but will it really be that much more?

I know some feel that this is the wrong site for a Senior Center. But the site sits adjacent to Nebraska Avenue and Wisconsin Avenue, two blocks away from a Metro station and a library and across the street from another Church. In many ways, it seems like an ideal location for a senior center.

My grandmother lived in a senior citizen home. She used to walk along the shopping street every morning. My own parents are now in their 80s and might soon need to consider something like this. Who am I to say that such a facility would be okay somewhere else, but not in my neighborhood?

Good neighbors look after the appearance of their property. I walked over to the Sunrise facility on Connecticut Avenue to see how well they take care of it. It looks well maintained. I Googled a number of other Sunrise properties and the exteriors all seem well maintained. I think we can assume that Sunrise will take care of this property as well.

We live in a wonderful neighborhood. I believe it is possible for us to share it.

Thank you.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Glen Williams" followed by a horizontal flourish line.