

To: Board of Zoning Adjustment  
RE: Case 21151 for 2324 North Capitol Street NW

Dear members of the BZA,

I am writing in my individual capacity as the Advisory Neighborhood Commissioner (ANC) for Single Member District (SMD) 5E04 in ANC 5E. Please note that this letter is not on behalf of the full ANC 5E and should not be considered as the opinion of the ANC.

Based on the significant community feedback that I have received from my SMD, residents are very supportive of a restaurant – namely Indigo 2 – opening at 2324 North Capitol St NW, and this letter seeks to reinforce support for this application.

With the recent opening of the Reservoir District Park – located just blocks away from 2324 North Capitol St NW — we have seen our community come together to enjoy the park and its various amenities. In the years to come, there will only be a significant increase in new Bloomingdale residents and visitors as the residential and retail facilities emerge, including Indigo 2. For more than two years, residents have been excited at the proposed plans that Indigo put forth to open a second location of their highly successful neighborhood restaurant..

Historically, the North Capitol Street NW corridor has been a notoriously difficult stretch to open a business on – especially in the challenging retail environment post-COVID. Not only does the immediate area currently lack storefronts, the ones that exist lie empty, or are businesses that have several on the record complaints filed against them due to how they operate their business. In the midst of this, it is a relief to see the applicants – who have an impressive record of opening and operating a successful restaurant already in the District, and in a residential neighborhood – wanting to make this investment in our community.

Here are the facts:

- A restaurant would be an amenity and beneficial to the neighborhood, as well as for Ward 5's economic growth and the District writ large.
- There is no evidence to suggest that this restaurant would exacerbate traffic problems. Right now, residents primarily walk to nearby establishments (Bacio, Etabli, Sylvan Cafe, Big Bear, Boundary Stone, El Camino, O'Kabul Cafe - to name a few) when they patronize said establishments. Residents – and visitors from across DC – patronize existing restaurants in the area with regularity and would benefit from a new addition.
- Indigo 2 – if granted the application – would serve new residents and visitors to the park, and soon to come housing and commercial establishments at the Reservoir District.
- This building has not been used for its residential purpose for a significant period of time. The location has been without a rental tenant since it was purchased by the applicants, and by all accounts, for some time before that too. Surely this building could be put to better use than leaving a unit to remain vacant.

- Having a restaurant serves as an additional gathering space for residents, and will further help create an inclusive, diverse, and welcoming space, that we want Bloomingdale to be known for.

As both a resident, and subsequently after being elected as an ANC, I have seen the applicants consistently engage with the community since they purchased this building, including, but not limited to, presentations and ongoing engagements with civic organizations and the ANC, as well as directly with residents.. The recent open house hosted by the applicants in June of this year also enabled residents with the opportunity to directly engage with the owners.y, as well as see the improvements made to the building.

The BZA has to consider two matters:

- 1) The special exception, which would provide the applicants with the flexibility for space that they require to open a viable restaurant.
- 2) The area variance relief, which would allow for a change in the use of the building, which is currently categorized as for residential purposes.

Granting area variance relief will benefit the neighborhood by permitting the addition of a much-anticipated establishment. Additionally, granting the relief will not have an adverse impact on the availability or affordability of housing in the neighborhood. With the development of the Reservoir District, hundreds of housing units are scheduled to become available within the next 1-2 years, including affordable housing for seniors.

The zoning requirement that this non-conforming property must be used for residential purposes has resulted in this building being vacant for the last three years (since 2021) and counting. I support the variance request here since there is a clear hardship for this to be a residential conversion. This restaurant is willing to occupy and improve this property that has had no meaningful use in the community since at least 2021.

I have reviewed the opposition letters in great detail and have noted the concerns made by some neighbors. It is true that North Capitol St NW has significant challenges re: street safety and high traffic speeds. But that is DDOT's responsibility to correct — one that they have refused to fix — and the opening of a commercial establishment will not exacerbate these challenges. Already, there exists at least one commercial business within 400 feet of the proposed Indigo 2 location: Capitol Market is currently 44 feet away, and other commercial establishments are expected to open within 400 feet in the coming months as part of the Reservoir District development.

Residents have also expressed concerns about rodents and trash – we have heard from residents who live near the original Indigo in NoMA (the applicants' current business) that the Indigo establishment takes steps for proper trash control and rodent mitigation at one of its locations on K St NE. These residents came out proactively to attend Bloomingdale Civic Association meeting to not only allay concerns, but also to voice support for the establishment and its owners as good-faith neighbors.

It is also important to note for the record that some neighbors have made veiled and overt bigoted remarks against the establishment's owners and the nature of their business. Like other immigrant communities, South Asians have also long faced discrimination in this country and it is highly condemnable that these bigoted remarks have been repeated in the protest letters and in comments at public meetings. I urge the BZA to reject any such statements made that fall under this category and discount such testimony.

As a community, we should be encouraging more businesses to invest in Bloomingdale and open their establishments in our neighborhood, especially in long-vacant spaces.

I request that the BZA grant the applicants both the special exception and the area variance as requested.

Best,  
Huma Imtiaz  
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