Testimony of Diane A. Pecor before the Zoning Commission
Case Number 02-15TA
July 1, 2002.

I appreciate this opportunity to testify in case 02-15, "Emergency Rulemaking and Setdown for Text Amendments to Permit Public Recreation and Public Community Centers Uses As A Matter of Right in the R-1 Zone. My name is Diane Pecor. I wear many hats as a transportation professional, a long-time advocate for good planning, a neighborhood activist, and perhaps most of all, an advocate for good decision-making that emanates from sound analysis and clear and non-contradictory principles. I do not represent here any specific group, but I do speak on behalf of many dozens who feel un-, under-, or mis-represented by their community organizations.

I have testified before the City Council and praised the Office of Zoning's move in the direction of providing tools for good analysis and it is my hope that the Zoning Commission will not retreat from this positive direction by voting "matter-of-right" on an issue that is not yet ready for prime time. The clear principles being violated in this case are 1) planning should precede zoning—zoning is not a tool for correcting planning failures, 2) someone in the District needs to be in charge when principles clearly contradict each other, 3) there are few situations where "one size fits all" which "matter of right," especially when misapplied, tends to assume, and 4) competent analysis and meaningful public involvement should always precede decisions that involve expenditure of public funds. Perhaps after we have completed the next round of the Comprehensive Plan revisions the issues raised in 02-15TA might be brought up again, but not now.

I have already placed some 34 pages of information on the record in this case and intend to submit more. In the balance of this testimony, I would like to put before you several transportation matters in the general area of Turkey Thicket. Every one of the 20 cases under this text amendment umbrella would provide a unique set of transportation issues, but I choose Turkey Thicket because it is the test case for this text amendment. For good or bad, my "hats" place me at many tables—and specifically exclude me from others where I clearly should have a seat. Either situation provides a unique placement for viewing the contradictions, i.e., watching how what one hand giveth the other taketh away.

- If you will allow me, focus on 10th Street NE between Taylor and Monroe, seven short blocks. Draw lines on any map or make any promises you want, but 10th Street is currently, and will continue to be, the entrance and egress to any recreation facility and virtually all activity on the Turkey Thicket playground. That fact cannot, and will not, be changed. 10th Street is a local street. 10th Street already carries 90 percent as much traffic as Monroe Street, which like Michigan Avenue, is classified two levels up as a minor arterial. No Federal funds are available to fix problems created on 10th Street.

- As the Brookings Institution has noted, we are a region divided. City officials tend to not "get" the east side of the city and thus misapply principles that work in Ward 3 but do not work in other places. When streets and roads were classified decades back, the east side of the city, and Ward 5 specifically, drew the short end of the stick. The city pretends

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this isn't a problem. It is. A huge one. Upper Ward 5 is filled with institutions, employment centers. Though the Ward 5 Plan indicates otherwise, it is not primarily residential. Residential land use accounts for just over 25 percent of the Ward.)

- The McMillan Sand Filtration Site, the Washington Hospital Campus, and the Soldier's Home, among others, all have proposals that radically will affect the condition on local streets and roads in Greater Brookland. None of these proposals specifically or accurately address the transportation consequences on the neighborhood, where many intersections are already at traffic levels E and F.

- The Zoning Commission has already approved a PUD for a conference center and hotel at Michigan and Irving. Good planning would have at least created an opportunity to facilitate an alternative solution. The conference center and hotel belongs on available land adjacent to west side of the Metro stop.

- You will, in September, hear Catholic University's Campus Plan. Though several of us attended each of the University's "community" meetings, in the end the University chose to operate under the radar. As one example, I have heard its transportation proposals are mind-numbing in their destructive consequences to the neighborhood, including "privatizing" and transferring traffic from what is currently a FAH street to, you guessed it, 10th Street NE.

- The bottom end of Turkey Thicket is within the ¼ mile zone of the Brookland-CUA Metro site, and all of it falls within ½ mile. If the city is even halfway serious about real transit-oriented development (not to be confused with development-adjacent transit or auto-dependent transit), it should be doing something meaningful to address the contradictions—in advance of the disasters in the making in this neighborhood. I know of at least 5 projects in this general area that people are calling "done deals." ALL have zoning issues.

- It is difficult to take seriously or give great weight to an ANC that declares transportation and environmental impact issues mere "red tape," as did ANC 5A in a letter to *The Common Denominator* on June 12, 2002.

- On June 28, 2002, the Washington metropolitan region suffered a Code Purple Day. Because of failure to meet air quality goals, we are, as a region, in serious danger of losing Federal transportation money. The Transportation Planning Board has spent much of the last year identifying measures to address this most serious of problems and its proposal is now out (until July 31) for public comment. Every single one of the bad transportation problems I raise here ADDS TO our air quality problems.

I thank you for this opportunity to testify and encourage you to reject the text amendment changes proposed in 02-15TA. The variance process, while not perfect, still offers the best present hope for sound decision-making and meaningful public involvement.

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Clean-Air Plan Wins Backing of Regional Leaders

Increase in Vehicle Exhaust Threatens U.S. Funding for Road, Transit Projects

By Katherine Shaver
Washington Post Staff Writer
Saturday, June 29, 2002; Page B01

Regional leaders endorsed new clean-air measures yesterday that they said would reduce vehicle exhaust enough to let the Washington area meet federal pollution limits and keep federal money for new road and transit projects.

The program would result in fewer government diesel trucks, more synchronized traffic lights, more clean-burning buses and more bicycle racks at Metro stations and park-and-ride lots. Governments would encourage walking, bicycling and transit ridership to reduce vehicle exhaust, which combines with sunlight to create unhealthy amounts of ground-level ozone.

The problem is most noticeable during the summer, when Code Red days alert people to especially high ozone and the need to limit their outdoor activity. Unusually hot, still weather made ozone levels climb so high Tuesday that the region reached a "Code Purple," more serious than Code Red and the highest level of ozone recorded here in the past five years, the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments said.

Proposed Clean-Air Program

Governments in the Washington region have reached an agreement on steps they will take to meet federal clean-air standards. This is what has happened and why:

The Problem: Regional officials must find a way to curb vehicle exhaust in the next two years or risk losing vital federal money for transportation projects. The problem became apparent last summer, when the staff of the region's Transportation Planning Board predicted that an increase in sport-utility vehicles and driving distances would lead the region to exceed its limits on exhaust in 2005. Some severe curbs on vehicle use were suggested, including a surcharge on parking to discourage auto commuting.

The Proposal: Maryland, the District and Virginia will carry out various programs designed to reduce the region's pollution. The impact will be less severe than some of the original proposals suggested. In the past year, officials downgraded their estimates of the pollution problem, thereby reducing the scope of the fixes.

Who Pays: The region will pay $41.6 million, with the biggest share -- $34.2 million -- coming from Maryland. Virginia will pay $514,000. Virginia's share is so small because the state's financial crisis led to the elimination of many road projects, reducing the state's potential to create pollution. Virginia, Maryland and the District will share the $6.8 million cost of re-timing traffic signals.

The Programs: They include re-timing of traffic signals in the District; expanded telecommuting in Virginia; and, in Maryland, replacement of old Montgomery County buses with ones that burn cleaner fuel, replacement of older diesel trucks in government fleets, new parking areas for bicycles, bike trails, and more parking at transit



The proposals in the $41.6 million antipollution program need the approval of the region's Transportation Planning Board, a branch of COG, when it meets July 31. However, key political leaders and planners representing Maryland, Virginia, the District and suburban counties endorsed them yesterday during COG meetings, making passage likely.

centers.

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Environmentalists praised efforts to solve the short-term smog problem created by more people driving sport-utility vehicles and light trucks farther among sprawling suburbs. The staff of the Transportation Planning Board had predicted last summer that the region would exceed its limits on exhaust in 2005.

Several environmentalists said the clean-air measures don't go far enough because stricter federal ozone standards are on the way.

"This is ultimately about getting air quality that's healthy enough for our kids to go out and play in the summertime without getting asthma," said Michael Replogle, federal transportation director for Environmental Defense.

The two states and the District have agreed to pay different shares, with Maryland picking up the bulk of the additional three-year costs, at $34.2 million. Jack Cahalan, a spokesman for the Maryland Department of Transportation, said Gov. Parris N. Glendening (D) "reprioritized" state transportation money to support "smart growth" and pro-transit policies.

"The governor is committed to better air quality and a better quality of life," Cahalan said. "He's backing that up with the necessary funding to make that happen."

The District took credit for $15 million worth of already planned sidewalk improvements over the next three years and would pay part of the cost to re-time traffic signals.

Virginia's recent financial woes had pollution payoffs. When state officials slashed their six-year road building program by almost $3 billion last week, Northern Virginia lost about 100 miles of planned highway upgrades. Without the extra exhaust from future driving on those roads, regional planners said, Northern Virginia could take credit for eliminating almost one-third of the smog problem.

Virginia allotted $514,000 to encourage government agencies and private companies to let more employees work from home. Virginia, Maryland and the District will share the $6.8 million cost of re-timing traffic signals.

It may look as if Maryland is shouldering more of the financial burden, but Northern Virginia officials said their road cuts count, too.

"You have to look at it from the perspective of what cleans the air," said Katherine K. Hanley (D), chairman of the Fairfax Board of Supervisors. "This is to solve the immediate problem. We'll have to grapple with the long-term problems when we look at the whole [transportation] network next year."

The list does not include any direct cost to commuters, such as a $1 daily parking tax briefly considered last fall as a way of discouraging people from driving to work.

The 1990 federal Clean Air Act required regions to account for vehicle exhaust from increased driving created by such factors as population growth and roads built or widened.

The Washington region has violated federal ozone standards for years but has been allowed to continue building new roads and widening others mostly because of new cleaner-burning fuels and lower-emission vehicles.

Measures that promote walking, transit, bicycle riding and telecommuting also help. Those clean-air programs usually offset the increased vehicle pollution enough to keep the region within its self-imposed limits on exhaust and other pollutants to gradually meet the federal ozone standards.

Although the region's air is getting cleaner, it's not happening fast enough. Regional officials became concerned last summer, when COG planners realized that the growth in SUV use and driving distances would outpace the improved technology and clean-air programs. That meant the region would far exceed its limits on vehicle exhaust in 2005, thereby threatening all federal money for new road and transit projects.

No new projects can be added to the region's long-term plans until the growth in noxious vehicle fumes is brought under control.

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