

**Alex MacKenzie Walworth
4420 29th Street NW
Washington, DC 20008**

September 30, 2002

Mr. Alberto Bastida
Clerk
Office of Zoning
District of Columbia

Re: Text Amendment 02-19
Forest Hills Tree and Slope Overlay

To the honorable members of the District of Columbia Zoning Commission:

My name is Alex Walworth, and I live at 4420 29th Street, N.W, with my husband and three young daughters. I have lived in Washington for 17 years, working as a journalist for most of that time.

We moved to Forest Hills from American University Park. We were drawn to the neighborhood for all of the obvious reasons: beautiful homes, majestic trees, and a feeling of wide-open space, all the while being only four blocks from Connecticut Avenue. When we were looking for a new home, we really wanted to stay in the city we love and raise our daughters here. So we were thrilled to find what we were looking for in Forest Hills.

Unfortunately, we have found out the hard way how little protection exists for the quality of life afforded in our new neighborhood.

Last February, I learned my neighbor, at 2900 Albemarle Street, had sold her house to a pair of developers famous for building huge houses on lots that are proportionally too small for them. And for running roughshod over the neighbors. Since my new home is situated directly behind, and is 10 to 20 feet lower than the property on Albemarle, I am very concerned about what they build and about storm water management. So this is both an aesthetic, and an economic issue for me. And that is how I came to be involved in the tree and slope overlay.

You have heard a lot this evening about the onerous burden a tree and slope overlay would place on those who want to build in Forest Hills. You've heard very little about what would be acceptable to the opponents of the current

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plan. And I submit that is because they really don't want a tree and slope overlay of any kind. They are asking you to scuttle years of work, for a promise on their part to "think about it."

I just don't think that's enough.

The proposal that the Ad Hoc Tree and Slope Committee developed is a good one. It was modeled closely after two other tree and slope zoning overlays already in place in the city. These overlays have been in place for years, and there has been not one request for a special exception in either neighborhood. So this alarmist hand-wringing about what a bureaucratic nightmare a tree and slope overlay would be for Forest Hills is just not borne out by the evidence.

There are thousands of tree protections in place across the country. Some are tougher than this, and some are not. But this is not some radical idea being foisted upon the citizens of Forest Hills. This proposal was developed with great care. And with an open door for any resident with a constructive idea to improve the plan.

Some members of the Ad Hoc Committee have met with the opponents of the overlay. The Committee was ready to discuss their concerns, but they did not come with one proposal or suggestion for compromise.

The opponents claim this will be a burden to those who want to develop land in Forest Hills. Well, I hope so. I hope there are provisions here that will make developers think before they cut. Otherwise there would be no point in our having spent months and months working on this.

The majority of residents in Forest Hills have seen the type of development that has gone on recently and they don't like it. It does not respect the social contract that used to be followed when homes were built. Too many of the homes being built today are overly large for their lots and intrusive on the space of the neighboring homes. Majestic trees that took 75 to 100 years to grow are being clear-cut when some of them -- perhaps many of them -- could be saved with a little careful planning. All we are trying to do is even the odds between developers, many with no stake in the neighborhood, and the residents who have lived here and plan to live here for a long time.

In just the past six months, I have learned of five new houses to be built within the overlay. The people who worked on this overlay are concerned about the slow erosion of open space they are seeing. And they're very worried about the type of development that could happen if a large institution decides to sell its land.

Forest Hills is a neighborhood with a lot of older residents. It is reasonable to expect there will be a lot of turnover in the next few years. That means more houses torn down and re-built, and more houses being remodeled. We want a vibrant and rejuvenated neighborhood. But not at the cost of losing the old trees and open space that make Forest Hills what it is.

This overlay was carefully constructed, with input from many residents who are concerned about protecting their homes and quality of life. No regulations are perfect, as I'm sure every member of the Commission well knows. But I believe the tree and slope overlay strikes a reasonable balance between regulating new development and protecting the majestic trees and open spaces that I submit are the prime reason we ALL moved to Forest Hills.

Our neighborhood would be a rare gem in any city. It deserves to be protected. Please vote in favor of the tree and slope overlay.

Thank you for your time.

Alex MacKenzie Walworth