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January 31, 2003

Alberto Bastida
Office of Zoning
441 4th Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20001

RECEIVED
D.C. OFFICE OF ZONING
2003 FEB -5 PM 3:31

Re: Comments on proposed Forest Hills Tree and Slope Overlay District ("FH/TSP")

Dear Mr. Bastida:

I write to voice my strong opposition to the proposed FH/TSP.

In short, the proposed regulations have been adopted without any consideration of the greater issues affecting Washington, D.C.

First, metropolitan Washington, D.C. has one of the worst traffic problems in the United States. Indeed, it has been reported that average commute times in the D.C. area are the second longest in the country. Second, the District for many years actually lost population, and it is critical that the District increase its tax base by attracting more residents.

Much, if not all, of Forest Hills is within walking distance of the Van Ness Metro stop. Any sensible zoning policy would seek to increase -- or at least maintain -- population density around Metro stops. This is especially true in a metropolitan area with severe traffic problems. Similarly, any attempt to attract new residents into the District would encourage -- or at least not discourage -- fill-in development.

The proposal in front of the Zoning Commission is poor public policy because it is an attempt to decrease population density in Forest Hills. Forest Hills has had a minimum lot size of 7500 square feet for approximately 40 years, and many homes have been built on lots that are the minimum or only slightly over the minimum size. The combination of the increase in minimum lot size, the decrease in the percentage of a lot a house can cover, the decrease in the permissible impervious surface area, and the increase in front and side yard setbacks means that future houses and additions will have to meet requirements that a large number of existing houses do not meet. It will also mean that Forest Hills, with its excellent access to public transportation and its proximity to downtown, will be significantly less densely populated than it would be under existing zoning requirements. Mandating large lots may make sense in Potomac or other distant suburbs; it does not make sense in the District.

Zoning Commission
District of Columbia
Case 02-19
Exhibit 299

ZONING COMMISSION
District of Columbia
CASE NO.02-19
EXHIBIT NO.299

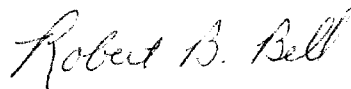
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The proposed FS/TSP is, at its core, not about preserving trees. It is about "freezing" the existing neighborhood by making it extremely difficult to build new houses or add on to existing houses. As the Forest Hills Neighbors for Responsible Preservation have pointed out, the proposal restricts property development in the neighborhood regardless of the impact on trees.

This is one of the worst examples of the "not in my backyard" syndrome of which I am aware. It will greatly restrict property development in a close-in neighborhood within walking distance of public transportation. It will reduce the number of people who could move into the neighborhood and increase the District's tax base. And it unfairly imposes far different requirements on future development than have been imposed on past development.

Nobody wants to turn Forest Hills into a neighborhood of McMansions or a neighborhood stripped of trees. That is not the issue before the Commission, however. The issue is whether to adopt an extreme proposal that is inimical to the District's basic transportation and taxation goals. I strongly urge that you reject it.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Robert B. Bell".

Robert B. Bell

cc: Robert V. Maudlin, Commissioner - 3F03