TO: MAXINE BROWN ROBERTS
FX: 202 535 2497
RE: CASE # 03-04
MERIDIAN HILL CONDOS

October 9, 2003

Dear Zoning Commissioners

I am writing regarding the Meridian Hill Condos proposal on Belmont Street. I have a serious concern about this proposal. First let me say that I strongly support dense urban projects in my neighborhood. As far as I'm concerned, the more people the better. What concerns me is that as best I can tell, this project proposes 315% of the amount of parking that would be required for a typical R-5-B development. (165 space parking garage, where only 52.5 spaces are required). It seems to me that a developer requesting a zoning variance for lot coverage and FAR ought to be making every effort to minimize any negative impact that the eventual occupants will have on the surrounding community. From my perspective, minimizing the number of cars would be the best way to lighten the impact. A development more suited to the Meridian Hill neighborhood would request a variance to provide LESS than the required parking and would use that space for additional housing.

In using the phrase, a development suited to the Meridian Hill neighborhood, I'm talking about a development that supports the transit-oriented nature of this community. Building triple the required parking not only fails to take advantage of the excellent access to bus and metro lines, it necessarily increases the traffic on 14th Street and thereby negatively impacts those who do use transit (by further congesting this primary bus corridor with additional vehicles). For many people in this neighborhood, transit is the only option. Per the 2000 Census, 64% of occupied households in this census tract have no vehicle available; only 19% of workers in this tract drive alone to work, 44% use transit, 19% walk, and 12% carpool. These numbers are off the charts and speak for themselves.

If I understand the public hearing notice correctly, it seems that many of these 165 vehicles could enter through the alley north of Belmont. This seems to be a lot of traffic for a narrow, quiet alley. The people at Bozzuto Homes pitch themselves as leaders within the Traditional Neighborhood Design movement. As I understand this movement, alleys are supposed to be promoted as wonderful opportunity spaces for neighborhood interaction. A project of this scale, with appropriate design, could single-handedly create such an excellent space, or it could prevent this opportunity for the foreseeable future.

All this said, I appreciate that the proposed development is a drastic improvement over the existing Pitts Hotel, but that should not prevent us from striving for something even better.

Sincerely,

Jonathon Kass
1462 Chapin Street, NW

ZONING COMMISSION
District of Columbia
Case 03-04
Exhibit 25

ZONING COMMISSION
District of Columbia
CASE NO.03-04
EXHIBIT NO.25