**TESTIMONY OF CATHY WISS**
**COMMISSIONER, ANC 3F06**

**4600 BRANDYWINE ASSOCIATES, ZC NO. 03-27**
**OCTOBER 14, 2004, HEARING**

Good evening, Chair Mitten and Zoning Commissioners. My name is Cathy Wiss. I represent SMD 3F06 and am here to present testimony for ANC 3F.

I appreciate the efforts the Applicant has made to meet with the community on this project. I participated in 8 of those meetings. At the meetings, my constituents expressed concern about the FAR and lot occupancy of the original plans. Commissioners questioned the appropriateness and advisability of balconies overhanging the Wisconsin Avenue sidewalk. Some asked for a loading dock to accommodate retail deliveries and moving vans. I asked that the building be set back 4 feet from the Wisconsin Avenue property line to give pedestrians more room in this narrow stretch where the avenue curves, that the top floors be stepped back to soften the roof line, and that the street corner be given a special treatment because of its important location in the Tenleytown shopping district. I also asked for a green roof and rain garden to treat storm water.

ANC 3F considered the revised application at its September 20, 2004, meeting, but concluded that it lacks exceptional merit and does not meet the standards of the Zoning Regulations or Comprehensive Plan.

You might recall that ANC 3F was involved with the planned unit development at 3901 Albemarle, which had to meet the test of "exceptional merit". It's something I call the "wow factor". In that case, when residents saw the design that finally was approved, they rose from their seats and exclaimed, "Wow!"[1] That reaction should occur with this project because it too must meet the higher exceptional merit test. It does not.

Furthermore, this site is zoned C-2-A, as part of a community based business district of "medium proportions". *See* 11 DCMR Section 720.4. In general, "medium" would seem to indicate commercial development at 1.5 FAR as a matter of right, *see* Section 771.2, or 2.0 FAR with a PUD, *see* Section 2405.2. Commercial development of this project stands at only .13 FAR.

---

[1] They were particularly taken with the layout of the townhouses in an arc and the generous set back from Albemarle Street. They also were relieved to have the driveway repositioned to Nebraska Avenue to lessen danger of accidents on Albemarle Street. Protection of the great white oak and trees in public space, as well as the conservation easement and special storm water management device to cleanse and restore groundwater to adjacent Soapstone Creek gave real environmental benefits to the city. Now that it is built, people so much enjoy walking past the project that foot traffic between the neighborhood and commercial district has increased.



ZONING COMMISSION
District of Columbia
CASE NO.03-27
EXHIBIT NO.45

The DC Comprehensive Plan Generalized Land Use Map calls for mixed use development of this site with medium density residential and moderate density commercial use. Even so, the commercial use offered by this project is too low. In fact, the land use element of the most recent Comprehensive Plan amended the Generalized Land Use Policies Map (Map 2) by adding an existing multi-neighborhood commercial center symbol on Wisconsin Avenue between River Road and Brandywine Street, N.W. 10 DCMR Section 1140.2. This indicates the city expects to retain, *not lose*, retail use here, while adding residential use. In fact, Section 1401.1(a)(1) of the Ward 3 Plan specifies that existing commercial uses in Ward 3 are expected to be maintained.

In its resolution, ANC 3F indicated it would not object to Zoning Commission approval of this application if it were revised as follows:

- **Enliven the Wisconsin Avenue façade**

The Wisconsin Avenue façade is important to ANC 3F because that is the part of the building that faces our ANC. Yet, most of the detailing and focus of the revised design is on the Brandywine Street façade. Effectively, the Wisconsin Avenue façade is treated like the side of the building, not the front, even though Wisconsin Avenue is Tenleytown's main street.

Because both the entrance to the residential component and the retail space face Brandywine Street, this building would have no entrance on Wisconsin Avenue. The only other building on the corridor without an entrance on Wisconsin is the Giant Food at Newark Street. Planners have considered this a problem for the surrounding shopping district. WTTG Channel 5 at Wisconsin and Harrison, the building which this project most resembles because of its wide garden fronting the street, does have a small door on Wisconsin Avenue, even though its main entrance is on Harrison Street.

Without a single entrance, the 121-foot long Wisconsin Avenue façade has little to pique the interest of the pedestrian on Wisconsin Avenue. It does not invite one in. It becomes simply a space that must be passed by to get from one place to another. The effect can be seen by comparing Drawing S10 of the original Application (dated July 2003) with Drawing A15 of the August 3, 2004, revised plans. In Drawing S10, storefronts with canopies greet people strolling by enjoying ice cream cones. In Drawing A15, pedestrians are separated from the building by a large garden. The building itself is hidden by trees.

Nor does the door to the retail component face the corner, as is the case with many corner buildings in Tenleytown: St. Ann's Church, the Riggs Bank, Taiwan Mission at Van Ness Street, Neisha Thai Restaurant, and even the In Vogue Hair Salon and Hudson Trail Outfitters across from this project. Other corner buildings, like Best Buy, add interest through a large corner display window or a flower garden, like the Tenley Library, Chipotle Restaurant, and Ruby Tuesday. In this project the door is hidden by a wall, and there is nothing to indicate that this is an important corner in Tenleytown.

The principal materials of glass and black steel are reminiscent of a K Street office building, as one commissioner stated at our ANC meeting. Steel is used as a

principal building material in few buildings on the Wisconsin Avenue corridor,[2] but these are medical and office buildings.

- **Restore commercial use to the entire Wisconsin Avenue frontage**

For the last few years, my constituents have been working to revitalize the Tenleytown shopping district and attract new businesses. A group has formed to explore a Main Street program. Recently, the shopping district has regained vitality with the opening of Best Buy and the Container Store, one-half block from this site.

The applicant states that Tenleytown residents are concerned about the lack of quality retail in the area, but is providing only 1,650 sq. ft. of retail space to meet that need, just 1/7 of the existing commercial space on this site. In a further reduction of retail use, the applicant expects this space to be occupied by a doctor or other professional, not true retail. The applicant stresses that future residents of the project will bring vitality to the neighborhood by patronizing retail establishments elsewhere. This seems a minor contribution to the retail vitality of the neighborhood.

In fact, reducing retail space on this site represents a missed opportunity for Tenleytown. Contrary to Drawing D2, which shows only office use north of the site, the 4600 block of Wisconsin Avenue is lined with restaurants and shops.[3] Some of these can be seen in Drawing E2. The 4500 block just to the south is in the heart of the Tenleytown shopping district and contains some favorite Tenleytown stores. If retail use is removed from this site, the shops and restaurants to the north will be separated, cut off from the main shopping district. They may even lose patrons.

In contrast, during meetings with the Applicant, residents said they would like an ice cream shop, a toy store, or a children's barber shop at this location. Stores like these would certainly enhance shopping in the 4600 block of Wisconsin and be an asset to the neighborhood. Many children live in the surrounding neighborhoods, and several nursery, elementary, junior and senior high schools are within a couple of blocks of the site. ANC 3F recommends that applicant add commercial space across the Wisconsin Avenue facade and consider the retail uses residents requested at the meetings.

- **Provide three "affordable" residential units at another location in the building**

In the original application, the Applicant proposed three affordable units on the ground floor a few feet from the animal hospital. The community felt this was a poor location. In the revised application, not only has the Applicant reduced the number of

---

[2] The Psychiatric Institute of Washington at 4228 Wisconsin has gold steel panels; a professional building at 5225 Wisconsin and WTTG at 5151 Wisconsin have black steel panels; a section of the Northwest Health Care center at 3333 Wisconsin has brown steel panels; the apartment tower now under construction above the historic Art Deco Sears Building at Albemarle and Wisconsin will be gray steel.

[3] These include Murasaki Japanese Restaurant, Allen Custom Frames, Krupin's Restaurant, Wonder Graphics, Tenley Travel, Pizza Hut, Chesapeake Kitchen Design, Realty Executives, Fiesta Travel, Taiwan Café, and Papa John's Pizza.

affordable units from three to one, the one unit is at ground level less than 30 feet from the noise and traffic of Wisconsin Avenue and next to the garden café of the Murasaki Japanese Restaurant. In the original application, this space was planned for retail. Indeed, its location is more suitable for commerce than living. Nowhere else in Tenleytown is a residential unit this close to Wisconsin Avenue.

ANC 3F recommends that this unit and the one next to it on the ground floor along Wisconsin Avenue revert to commercial use and that the applicant allocate three units elsewhere in the building for affordable housing.

- **Redesign the Wisconsin Avenue streetscape to give adequate and required space to the sidewalk and treebox**

The application includes two streetscape designs. The August 3, 2004, design shows a one-foot-high undulating wall between the Wisconsin Avenue sidewalk and planting beds that flank the building. This wall makes the sidewalk too narrow where it comes closest to the street. The DDOT Public Space dimension for the sidewalk in this block of Wisconsin Avenue is 6 feet. The wall should be adjusted to allow a sidewalk of at least 6 feet on this busy pedestrian section of Wisconsin Avenue. Similarly, drawing S-3 (August 3, 2004) indicates that the treeboxes will be only 5'6" wide, not the 6 feet required by Public Space. The treeboxes should be enlarged.

- **Revise the landscaping plan to include trees that can be expected to survive where planted**

The applicant plans to remove and replace all street trees surrounding the property. Before doing so, the applicant should have them examined to determine whether any should be saved. Retaining established trees would allow them to continue to shade our streets and clean our air. If trees need to be replaced, the applicant should work with the Urban Forestry Administration (UFA) to determine what species to plant in lieu of red oaks. The UFA web site states on the list for street trees that "until further notice, the Urban Forestry Administration is not recommending the planting of red oaks due to the presence of Bacterial Leaf Scorch."

The applicant also plans to plant purple plum trees in planter boxes between the building and sidewalks on Wisconsin Avenue and Brandywine Street. Many ornamentals planted near Wisconsin Avenue in Tenleytown – dogwoods, crabapples, cherries -- have succumbed quickly to severe conditions and pollution. The literature on purple plums does not augur well: they are described as short-lived, not pollution tolerant and susceptible to numerous diseases and insects.[4] Some trees that are thriving along Wisconsin Avenue are hollies, evergreen and deciduous magnolias, and crapemyrtles.

The applicant plans to plant red oaks on the side terrace on what is in fact the roof of the parking garage. Red oaks are large canopy trees that need a lot of space in which to grow. If restricted to shallow and tight planter boxes they will either grow slowly and

---

[4] *See* Michael A. Dirr, *Manual of Woody Landscape Plants* (Stipes Publishing Company, Champaign, Ill. 1990); American Horticultural Society, *A-Z Encyclopedia of Garden Plants* (DK Publishing, New York 1996).

succumb more easily to disease, or break through the walls of the box or into the garage. The Applicant should chose other trees for the terrace and make sure they could survive in this situation and pose no danger to the terrace, the parking garage below, or the Friendship Animal Hospital next door.

- **Include a rain garden to meet storm water needs not addressed by the partial green roof**

The Applicant has agreed to construct a green roof on top of the mechanical penthouse, a positive contribution. The green roof will help cool the building and the surrounding area, as well as remove pollutants from storm water. If the DC Environmental Health Administration requires more storm water management techniques from this site, ANC 3F requests that applicant install a rain garden in one of its planting beds.

- **Allocate space in the parking garage for a car-share program and a bicycle parking shed**

The Washington Smart Growth Alliance recognized this project for locating "new residential units along a major transportation corridor and in close proximity to Metro," see June 2004 revised applicant, Tab E, but recommended that one or more parking spaces in the garage be designated for a car-share program and that a caged bicycle shed be installed in the garage. These would be positive contributions. Two-car families moving into the building could sell one car and use the car-share program when a second is needed. A bicycle shed would encourage more residents to have and use bicycles.