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2005 MAR -8 PM 2:37

March 7, 2005

Carol J. Mitten, Chairperson,
D C Zoning Commission
441 4th Street, N W , Suite 210 South
Washington, D C 20001

Re Case Number 04-16, Takoma Neighborhood
Commercial Zoning Overlay District

Dear Madam Chairperson,

I am writing to express my views about the proposed zoning overlay for parts of Takoma DC, which your commission has under its consideration I have read the Office of Planning report of October 18, 2004 and reviewed the map and proposed zoning text changes I have also read the transcript of your meeting of January 24 on this subject

By way of background, I live less than a block from the edge of the Blair Road portion of the Overlay District, which can be viewed from my front porch (My home is at the corner of Piney Branch and Blair Roads) I have been a resident of Takoma DC for more than 30 years, have participated in every planning effort relating to our neighborhood since 1976, and was among several residents who proposed the Takoma Historic District in 1979 I have served as an Advisory Neighborhood Commissioner (4B02), am former president of Neighbors Inc , and one of the four founders of Historic Takoma, Inc I am a member of the board of directors of the DC Preservation League and served for many years as a trustee of the Committee of 100 on the Federal City

This letter is my own, I note the above organizations only to establish my credentials with your board My hope is that you will give careful consideration to my views

History of the Takoma Plan/Overlay District With regard to the comments raised at your meeting on January 24, the reason that you did not hear from the community is that most of us were not paying enough attention to this issue The plan that OP developed during for the Takoma Central District was extremely controversial It divided the neighborhood, pitted neighbor against neighbor, and even destroyed a number of friendships Some felt it would bring needed new developments to down-trodden, underused areas of Takoma DC; others felt it would destroy the character and charm that makes our neighborhood unique and desirable When the opponents lost and the District Council approved the plan in June 2002, most of the opponents (and I was one who opposed many, although not all, of the elements of the plan) gave up. When the zoning overlay was later proposed, the proponents of the plan apparently assumed—and at least one leader has stated so publicly—that they felt the zoning overlay would simply implement the plan and hence was non-controversial

Current situation. Now the issue has been resurrected through the efforts of one of our ANC commissioners, followed by lively discussions on the Takoma List Serve The same divisions in our neighborhood that erupted with the OP plan have now resurfaced with regard to the Overlay District And, **although several constructive suggestions have been made for improving the overlay, we've been told it is now all or nothing**--that any amendments would cause the entire process to stop and require a new study of the proposal, which could curtail new developments, such as one for the current B&B property along Blair Road.

ZONING COMMISSION
District of Columbia
CASE NO.04-16
EXHIBIT NO.27

I neither fully support nor fully oppose the Overlay District In the past I have found that general plans, even major zoning changes, do not fully resonate until an actual development is proposed. Only then do people focus on its potential impacts--the height and bulk and density, the uses, the style and design, effects on traffic and parking, noise, environmental impacts, etc

Indeed, the major concern I have with the proposed zoning overlay is that it will **give a false impression to potential developers that they can, indeed, develop to the maximum allowed under the zoning.** Yet there are other considerations that remain, which I would like to bring to your attention

(1) Historic Preservation. All of the areas included in the zoning overlay are within the Takoma Park (DC) Historic District Included are a number of one story, historically contributing properties along 4th Street between Butternut and the Blair Road/Cedar Street intersection, and the historic Takoma Theatre (see photos attached) **Demolition of these buildings would not be allowed**, regardless of the new Overlay District Furthermore, new developments on land currently vacant or occupied by more modern buildings must be compatible with adjacent and nearby homes within the historic district

(2) Traffic/Transit/Parking. Subsequent to the OP Plan, DC DOT did a transportation study of Takoma Recommendations were made to improve our traffic, transit and parking problems In presenting the final study to the community, the consultants noted the potential impacts of too much increased density in our predominately residential neighborhood They said that **if areas in the Takoma Central District Plan were fully developed per the OP Plan, the traffic mitigation measures they recommended would NOT be sufficient.** Any future developments must, therefore, not exacerbate the traffic and parking problems we face, especially along Piney Branch, Blair Roads and Fourth Street on the west of Metro and Cedar/Carroll Avenues on the east

(3) Density. I agree that some increased residential density around Metro could benefit us in getting more retail amenities, but there are limits to how much the neighborhood can accommodate In this regard, I support the amendments OP proposed that would eliminate the requirement for retail on the first floor of new construction along Blair Road and the area north of the village green at the Metro But, if possible to do without causing unnecessary delays, I also **support clarifying the Takoma Central District Plan's stipulations that new developments should not exceed 2-4 stories in height.** This would help maintain the low scale visual context of most of Takoma while allowing appropriate new developments to occur

In closing, I was heartened by the Commission's concerns about our neighborhood and appreciate your willingness to give us more time to express our views, of which you will undoubtedly now receive quite a diversity Thank you for taking the time to hear from us

Sincerely,

CC Ms Patricia Gallagher, Director, National Capitol Planning Commission
Mr Tersh Boasberg, Chairman, DC Historic Preservation Review Board

4TH & Butternut Streets NW, Takoma DC, March 7, 2005

Photos by Loretta Neumann





Historic Takoma Theatre, 4th and Butternut Streets NW (SE Corner)
March 7, 2005
Photos by Loretta Neumann



