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May 1, 2005

Ms. Carol Mitten, Chair
Zoning Commission
Office of Zoning
441 4th Street, NW, 210-S
Washington, DC 20002

Fax No.: 202-727-6072

Reference: Takoma Neighborhood Commercial Overlay District, Case No. 04-16

Dear Ms. Mitten:

The Office of Planning's Takoma Overlay Zone provisions need to be better attuned to Takoma. The new construction in the Overlay Zone should conform to the Revitalization Goals expressed in the Office of Planning's Takoma Central District Plan, which call for preserving and enhancing Takoma's small town/village character, and encouraging a neighborhood scale for new development. It goes on to state that "New residential and commercial buildings should be no more than 2-4 stories in height to match existing neighborhood scale."

Also, several urban development specialists -- such as Donovan D. Rypkema, Christopher Leinberger, Gene Bunnell, John Eger – repeatedly emphasize that successful and sustainable neighborhood commercial districts convey a "sense of place". Mr. Rypkema states, "A place indistinguishable from any other place has no competitive advantage. A 'someplace' with no differentiation becomes an 'anyplace'. And the distance from anyplace to no place is short indeed."

Within this context, it is clear that the Takoma Overlay Zone should limit new building height to 50'. This relates much better to the architectural scale of Takoma than the 55' that the Office of Planning proposes. Also, considering even the 50' height of new buildings and our narrow streets, the setback from the curbline should be at least 15'. We already see that Cedar Crossing on Blair Road feels very close to the sidewalk and street. That building is set back 18' from the curbline. And that's not enough.

One of the attractions of Takoma is that much of it feels comfortably spacious and not crowded. This is an important asset and attribute that contributes to its "sense of place".

Please support Takoma's successful revitalization and preserve its "sense of place" by requiring a 50' height limit to new buildings and 15' minimum setback from the curbline in the Overlay Zone.

Sincerely,

ZONING COMMISSION
District of Columbia
CASE NO. 04-16
EXHIBIT NO. 53

Tori Paide
407 Aspen St NW

ZONING COMMISSION
District of Columbia
CASE NO.04-16
EXHIBIT NO.53

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Ms. Carol Mitten, Chair
Zoning Commission
Office of Zoning
441 4th Street, NW, 210-S
Washington, DC 20002

Fax No.: 202-727-6072

Reference: Takoma Neighborhood Commercial Overlay District, Case No. 04-16

Dear Ms. Mitten:

I've waited a long time for the commercial district of Takoma to look good, so I want to be sure that the revitalization is done right. That's why I want the height limit for new buildings in the commercial zone to stay at 50' and the setback from the street to be at least 15' to the streetwall of the new buildings. Anything taller than that is too tall, and anything closer to the street than that doesn't look good. It feels too squeezed, and it doesn't allow enough room for two pairs of friends to pass each other going in opposite directions without having to go single file.

I want the Old Takoma business district to be a vibrant, welcoming and fun place to go to and walk around. If the sidewalks are wide enough to comfortably walk along with family and friends and wide enough so that pedestrians do NOT feel too dangerously close to passing cars, trucks and buses and their exhaust fumes, that will help make this a walkable community.

As for the 50' limit, one of the things that Takoma is known for is low buildings. The higher the buildings, the more you feel hemmed in by brick and mortar, concrete and steel. 50' is already higher than nearly any building here except the new ones around the Metro station. Taller buildings don't feel like Takoma, and still taller buildings would feel even less so. They make us less unique and more like any other place. And that puts us on the road to "no place" that anyone would go out of there way to visit or shop in.

Sincerely,

Ophelia C. Cowan

Ophelia C. Cowan
861 Van Buren Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20012

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Reference: Takoma Neighborhood Commercial Overlay District, Case No. 04-16

Dear Ms. Mitten:

I support keeping the 50' limit for new buildings in the proposed commercial Overlay Zone of Takoma DC. 55' is too high, and it's much higher than any of the other buildings here. The two new buildings around the Takoma Metro are about 50' high. These give us a point of comparison. The buildings around them are lower, and are no more than 3 stories high. The current height limit for buildings in the C-2-A zone is 50'. That's high enough for Takoma.

Also, the 15' setback from the street is better than the 13' that the Office of Planning proposes. Our streets and sidewalks are too narrow for these tall buildings. Most of our old stores and the Theatre are set back far from the street. The old stores on Fourth Street are just one story tall, so the sidewalk feels wide enough, and it seems far enough away from the passing cars and buses because cars are usually parked between the sidewalk and the traffic.

I hope that the Zoning Commission understands that we want a safe, attractive and inviting commercial area where people will come to buy things in new stores that will open as well as those already here. That's why I want to keep the height limit at 50' and require the setback from the street to the streetwall to be at least 15'.

Sincerely,

RAY A. COWAN
861 - VAN BUREN ST. NW
WASH., D.C. 20012