May 1, 2005

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2005 MAY -2 PM 3:27

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,

Faith E. Wheeler

Faith E. Wheeler
818 Whittier Pl. NW
Washington, D.C. 20012

ZONING COMMISSION
District of Columbia
CASE NO. 04-16
EXHIBIT NO. 54

RECEIVED
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May 2, 2005

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

RE: Proposed Takoma, D.C. Overlay Zone
ZONING COMMISSION CASE NUMBER 0416

Fax No.: 202-727-6072

Dear Chairman Mitten:

Please do not approve the Proposed Takoma, D.C. Overlay Zone as it is written.

I am a 30-year resident of the District of Columbia, and a former Advisory Neighborhood Commissioner (ANC 4B01, which includes the area covered by this proposal) as well as an active participant in several decades of zoning issues in Takoma, D.C.

I also was a member of the "Working Group" that developed the last master plan revision for Takoma and attended every one of the one dozen or more public meetings that were held a few short years ago. We had several hundred residents participate in this process.

Although there was debate about a number of elements in the master plan revision, there was unanimous agreement on several issues, including the core goal of preserving our "small town/village character." This point is made repeatedly and early in the Takoma Central Plan, which specifies that new development (both commercial and residential) should be **"no more than 2-4 stories in height to match existing neighborhood scale."**

Now, the city is telling us that 55 feet is just fine and there is, theoretically, no limitation on the number of stories. Well, I don't think it is fine. It is too tall — taller than any of the buildings we currently have in Takoma, and buildings of this height will change the character of our community.

(Continued on Page Two)

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Ms. Carol Mitten
Page Two -- May 2, 2005
Proposed Takoma Overlay Zone - Case Number 0416

If, during the city-sponsored so-called "planning" process, the city leaders had told us they were going to slip in an amendment increasing the possible height of buildings, people would have screamed loud and hard. They would have realized the basic dishonesty of the city and of the process.

Instead, the city drafted a document promising two to four stories maximum and adopted it with a great deal of fanfare. Then, a year or two later, an amendment increasing the allowable height of the buildings is adopted.

Also, I think that you will see builders coming to you in the future for height variances so that the 55-foot limitation can be tweeked to permit five or so stories.

**So, please consider retaining the original limitation of 50-feet.**

And, if you look at other zoning overlay districts in the city, you will find that at least one overlay district has a written limitation on the number of stories permitted as well as limitation on the number of feet.

**So, please make certain that whatever language you adopt includes the restriction to four stories, maximum.**

Many thanks,

Sara Green -- signed by Faith Ulwick as authorized by Sara Green
Faith L. Ulwick

Sara Green
7106 Piney Branch Road, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20012
Tele: 202 829-8802

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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,

Isobel P. Murray

Isobel P. Murray
510 Aspen St. NW.
Washington D.C 20012