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FOR LIVABLE COMMUNITIES

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Testimony in Support of the Proposed Action
before the District of Columbia Zoning Commission regarding:

Case No. 04- 22 Abdo Development, LLC – 220 H Street, NE

by Cheryl Cort
Washington Regional Network for Livable Communities
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My name is Cheryl Cort and I am the executive director of the Washington Regional Network for Livable Communities (WRN). WRN is a Washington-based non-profit organization promoting a regional vision of a network of diverse, walkable communities linked by transit, graced by parks, and surrounded by forests and farms, with the District of Columbia as the hub. Through education, outreach and policy advocacy, WRN promotes transportation investments, land use policies, and neighborhood designs that enhance existing communities and protect the environment.

We are particularly concerned with how to accommodate the region's growth in jobs and households in a way that makes the most of existing transportation facilities and other urban infrastructure, protects greenspace on the outskirts of the region, and enhances the quality of life of the inner suburbs and city. We are also concerned that redevelopment in urban communities is inclusive – promoting diverse housing choices so that people of all incomes can live in convenient, walkable neighborhoods near transit and jobs.

Given our commitment to quality transit-oriented development, WRN supports the proposed project at the Capital Children's Museum site. In fact, this project is an exemplary redevelopment project in many ways. We believe this project will contribute greatly to the quality of life in both the surrounding community and to the region. We concur with the support that this project has found from the D.C. Office of Planning and among many community members and groups. This project is a substantial contribution to transit-accessible housing opportunities in the neighborhood, city and region. Its attractive urban design, pedestrian-scale and street-orientation contributes greatly to creating a successful walkable neighborhood close to Metrorail and other transit services. The project also supports H Street revitalization efforts by bringing a large number of new households to patronize stores along the corridor. New residents in these street-oriented buildings will bring greater safety to the area by providing more "eyes on the street," and by supplying more walk-in customers to nearby shops and transit services in the area. By providing a substantial number of new homes close to a major job center, the project reduces regional vehicle miles traveled, air pollution and traffic congestion. The close proximity of homes, jobs and retail, along with the streetscape improvements, and pedestrian and bicycle connections not only create a safer and more inviting pedestrian environment, they also support

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the region's transit system by generating more off-peak trips, and reverse commute trips on Metrorail and Metrobus.

Regarding affordable housing, while we anxiously await the Zoning Commission to take up the proposed Zoning Text Amendment to create a mandatory inclusionary zoning policy for the city, we appreciate the developer's willingness to voluntarily offer a sizeable amount of below market rate and affordable housing as a part of this project.

Regarding the height and size of the project – be believe that this project is appropriately sized to the site given the efforts of the developer to restore the historic buildings, and the site's proximity to the rail yard, adjacent commercial buildings, and H Street bridge.

Regarding parking we would ask that a reduction from the proposed 1:1 parking ratio be encouraged. This prime location accessible to jobs, transit, stores and services greatly reduces the need to own a car. Indeed, in this Census Tract, 26 percent of owners and 50 percent of renter households do not own a car. Instead of offering parking far above zoning regulations and current car ownership rates, we ask that alternatives to car ownership be subsidized rather than potentially subsidizing parking. We suggest reducing the parking ratio closer to the zoning code or current car ownership rates, and using some of the savings to subsidize Flexcar and Zipcar, transit passes, and lower prices for the affordable housing units. (We appreciate the bicycle parking offered onsite).

Parking costs are tremendous – underground spaces cost $20,000 and up. Parking is far from free, but often the user does not pay the full cost, and this distorts our perception of what parking truly costs when making travel choices. Parking costs, on average, amount to 20 percent of the total cost of a housing unit, and can reduce housing densities by about 20 percent. If our region, city and neighborhoods are to be successful, walkable places served by high quality, reliable transit, we must work to foster true travel choices that reduce reliance on driving and car ownership. This site is highly suited to offer the travel cost savings of reduced parking. At a minimum, we ask that the parking be sold separately from the cost of housing, and that the parking costs not be subsidized by those not using the space. Car-less households will be attracted to this convenient location because they can save the costs of owning and storing a car, and put that money into an appreciating asset – a home. We ask that more be done to encourage this choice and realize this savings.

To conclude, we support the proposal because we believe that as smart growth and environmental activists, we must lead the way to more sustainable communities by promoting opportunities for people to live in walkable, transit-oriented neighborhoods. As our region grows, we must direct growth to create lively, attractive urban areas while protecting rural reaches of the region for agriculture, recreation and conservation. This proposal is a substantial contribution towards this effort.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this project.

Attached: WRN brief: "Neighborhood Parking Solutions: How to manage parking to create better communities, affordable housing and greater access"

Neighborhood Parking Solutions

How to manage parking to create better communities, affordable housing and greater access



Parking management in an urban neighborhood is a difficult balancing act between the needs of residents, employees, shoppers and commuters - not to mention those who don't own a car at all. Parking is an essential component of a successful, vibrant business district. However, each space is extremely expensive, consumes land that could be used for housing or businesses, detracts from the pedestrian environment and adds more traffic to already congested streets. In some neighborhoods, existing residents are demanding more parking be built into new buildings than is needed for new residents. This practice unnecessarily drives up the cost of housing (an underground parking space costs $20,000 or more and can increase the cost of a unit by 20 percent) and reduces the opportunities to build more housing for people who want to live in popular neighborhoods.

To address parking needs and conflicts, and forge better approaches to access for all people attracted to the neighborhood, we need to manage parking efficiently, and ensure that everyone has good options for getting around.

It is important to determine the optimal amount of parking and to use more efficiently all parking facilities – on and off street. To start, neighborhoods need to comprehensively review parking demand, supply and pricing to assess how parking requirements can be adjusted and determine where innovative solutions are appropriate.

Parking strategies to manage demand:

- Reduce minimum zoning requirements for parking in new development for senior, special needs and affordable housing, since residents in these buildings tend to own substantially fewer vehicles.
- In walkable, transit-rich neighborhoods, eliminate minimum zoning requirements for parking and adopt maximum limits for off-street parking.
- Separate the cost of housing from the cost of leasing or purchasing a parking space.
- Manage residential on-street parking -- set permit prices to reflect demand and available curbspace, or limit the number of new residential parking permits.
- As an interim measure, restrict access to residential parking permits for new apartment buildings where parking is scarce so that neighbors will not demand that more parking than is warranted is built by the developer.
- Use meters to optimize turnover of spaces for priority users. Raise meter prices to reflect market demand. Charge for curbspace during peak hours, e.g. night time entertainment districts would require meter charges during peak night time hours.
- Implement visitor parking charges using multi-space meters to manage curbspace in high demand residential parking permit neighborhoods.
- Institute "transportation demand management" plans (TDM) for all new development – both commercial and residential. Plans for office buildings should include showers for bicyclists, & secure bicycle parking, transit benefits, parking cash out. Residential TDM plans should include bicycle parking, transit benefits for residents and subsidized ZipCar & FlexCar on location.
- Require shared parking in mixed-use developments and in mixed use areas, since peak demand periods occur at different times.

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