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April 13, 2006

Carol J. Mitten, Chairman
Zoning Commission
441 4th Street NW
Suite 210 South
Washington DC 20001

Re: ZC 06-09 Howard University

Dear Chairman Mitten:

I am the owner of 2243 10th St. NW and the purchaser (pending clean title) of 2241 10th St. NW. I am planning to build a single-family rowhouse on the consolidation of these two empty properties, which sit directly across Florida Avenue from Square 2872, where Howard University has proposed an enlarged surface parking lot.

I am also a city planner, and one who addressed the Commission not too long ago on the topic of form-based codes. (You may recall my admonition against parking lots along sidewalks, so I write this letter with a sense of irony.) My current position is as Director of Design at the National Endowment for the Arts, but I am writing as a land-owner, and city planner who advises mayors on the design of their cities.

The properties which I own and have under contract have been vacant and collecting trash for many years. The neighborhood is somewhere between "struggling" and "transitional" Many people have invested in the area, but it has yet to become an attractive setting for pedestrian life. And again, as most city planners agree, few things are less attractive to pedestrians than walking past parking lots. For this reason, I fear that the construction of a larger parking lot on this prominent site, at such a critical moment in its evolution, would be a grave error.

That's my planner's opinion. As an investor, I question the wisdom of building a new house on my empty properties if they are going to be directly across the street from an enlarged parking lot. My money would be more safely spent elsewhere – like in Maryland! I purchased my properties with a full understanding of what was legal across the street, and this did not include the outcome you are now considering.

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EXHIBIT NO. 20

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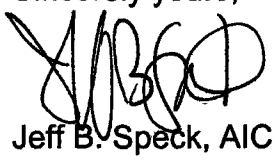
Square 2872 is a property of tremendous potential value. I would love the opportunity to put it to real use with a small apartment building or condominium, as the current zoning and Comprehensive Plan envision. Allowing Howard University to invest in a surface parking lot – a severe under-utilization – would delay the site's reaching a potential that other developers would be willing to pursue immediately if given the chance.

Furthermore, observing parking loads in that neighborhood, one finds many available on-street parking spaces. On a visit to the site at 10 AM today (Thursday), I found only one car parked along the Florida Avenue side of the subject property, even though spaces exist for five or six cars. And this is with the former on-site parking lot closed and gated. That said, the need for parking is really a moot point, since additional parking could and should eventually be provided in a way that is not destructive to pedestrian life, under or behind a building that provides an attractive edge to the sidewalk.

As a planner and potential neighbor to this site, I wish to add my voice to that of ANC1B in advocating that the Planning Commission not allow Howard University to undermine this neighborhood's recovery by building its proposed parking lot. Like the ANC, I would also be willing to work with the University, free of charge, to suggest more fruitful uses for their property.

Please feel free to call me if I can be of any help in your deliberations, or if there is interest at the University in meeting with me.

Sincerely yours,



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cc:
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