

**Statement of Willie L. Baker, Jr.**  
**Washington, DC Zoning Commission Testimony**  
**September 8, 20014**

Hello, my name is Willie L. Baker, Jr. I reside at 1508 Missouri Ave., NW. Washington, DC. – representing Ward 4 Thrives, a community organization in Ward 4. I am here today to testify regarding the DC Zoning Commission’s plan to include a special exemption requirement for Large Format Retail Stores.

Large retail stores, relative to small retailers, present unique adverse impact on a community: in relation to its traffic patterns, its neighborhood character and the affect on surrounding businesses. Therefore, it is essential to require that a proposal of this type of store go through a **public process** that evaluates it costs and benefits to the community prior to receiving any approval to proceed with the proposal.

These big box stores should have a process that allows the citizens of the District to weigh in on the appropriateness of these projects publicly.

The District’s existing zoning code does not regulate Big Box stores. Rather, the District provides for “as of right” development for virtually all Big Box stores located on commercially zoned land.

In nearly all cases a developer who has the proper zoning to build retail, is permitted to build any retail, not withstanding the proposed square footage of the store, or its impact on the community, traffic, or character of the neighborhood.

The problem with this proposal is that you exempt from this proposal those that are covered by large tract review.

The problem with this exemption is that nearly all-large format retail stores are subject to large tract review. Large tract review is conducted internally by the Office of Planning. It is **advisory** in nature and does not provide members of the public with an opportunity to air their grievances with a proposal publically. Without removing this exemption, Office of Planning’s proposal would not apply to nearly all of the stores to which the proposal was designed.

The second problem is with the definition of large retail stores, that Office of Planning included in its proposal. Office of Planning included:

A single retailer or common retail space with a minimum 50,000 square feet; the use shall include warehouse club stores, with or without paid membership, discount membership, discount retailers, and similar use. A large format retailer

may include grocery sales as a secondary use, but a grocery store shall not be considered a large format retail use.

This definition does not define what “grocery sales as a secondary use” means. To remedy this problem the zoning commission could provide a specific definition for secondary use, such as any particular use that does not exceed 50% of the stores sales or square footage.

The purpose of all of these proposals should be to make the process of building in the District of Columbia open and transparent. It should not be a process that is designed simply to give builders and developers carte blanche to run over the citizens of the district, nor should it be designed to prevent building in the city. Its goal should be to develop a process by which we get the best for the citizens and the builders in this district. That cannot be accomplished if we continue, as in the past, to lock the process, so that developers are the only voice that can be heard. The citizens and the district deserve better. This could and should be our opportunity to make this a truly livable, enjoyable and great city.

Thank you.