

Union Station North
Case Number 09-21
January 6, 2011

Good evening Commissioners,

My name is Tony Goodman, and I am here to express my strong support for the new Union Station North District. I live on 4th Street NE in ANC 6C, and live approximately four blocks from this proposed zone. I am also a member of the ANC 6C Planning, Zoning and Environment (PZE) Committee, and a member of the Steering Committee of the Capitol Hill North Neighborhood Association (CHNNA).

For nearly two years, the Office of Planning (OP) has been working closely with our ANC PZE Committee on the USN language and associated amendments to the District of Columbia Comprehensive Plan. OP incorporated many of the suggestions that we made in these numerous public, in ways that will greatly improve the impact of this development on our neighborhood. These modifications have created a set of regulations that will help produce a high quality development that will improve the community, city and region in many ways.

Specific modifications based on 6C PZE comments include, but are not limited to:

1. OP strengthened residential requirements by replacing an original vague "mixed-use" requirement with an FAR based approach that requires a substantial amount of residential floor area to maximize the zoning potential of the site.
2. OP changed the bicycle parking requirements to align more closely with LEED 2009 guidelines by the US Green Building Council and potential new District wide bicycle zoning regulations.
3. OP recommended specific locations for connection from the air rights development to the surrounding neighborhoods.
4. The ground floor use language has been modified to increase the number and variety of retail tenants along H Street.
5. The development is required to pay close attention to height and massing in the northeast corner of the site, which is the closest portion of the site to existing rowhouses. (However, this block of rowhouses, between I and K at 2nd Street, is still separated from the air rights lots by another lot on top of the Burnham wall).

Union Station, as well as the Burnham Wall supporting the railroad tracks, are a wonderful asset to our neighborhood and city, and certainly represent some of the best architecture in the District. However, the train tracks themselves serve as a harsh barrier between East and West, and exacerbates the divide between NW and NE Washington, DC. Meanwhile, the H Street overpass is a desolate, harsh commuter speedway that is uncomfortable to walk on and detracts from the vibrancy of the area.

Nonetheless, I walk this area often, both on occasional walks downtown (now that NoMA is being developed, I often walk down First Street NE instead) and, more often, when going to Union Station. The closest entrance to Union Station from our neighborhood is through the parking garage fronting on H Street. This is not a pleasant walk. Union Station, while beautiful from the South, turns its back onto our neighborhood. In particular, the buildings facing North Capitol and First Streets NE, can be disorienting and unpleasant because the buildings do not relate at all to the sidewalks on H Street.

The railroad tracks and H Street bridge are not just scars through our community – they are open wounds that I know can only be healed through future development as guided by the new USN zoning district.

The current zoning classification for this area is industrial, and allows for a maximum FAR of 6.0 and maximum height of 90 feet. The proposed zoning would allow for 130 foot heights with an FAR of 15.

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However, there will actually be less non-residential development: a maximum FAR of 5.5. The other 1.0 must be residential. This alone is a huge improvement over the current zoning, which does not allow residential at all. Having residents living on H Street, in addition to potential office, retail and hotel uses, will allow this area to be fully incorporated into the neighborhoods on either side of the tracks, and will help encourage more of the future retail to be neighborhood-serving uses. In addition, this proposed maximum FAR is far lower than the west-adjointing NoMA neighborhood, which generally allows 10.0, and is less than many of the other surrounding developments on the eastern edge.

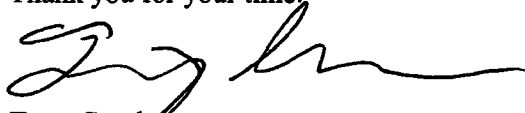
Another major improvement is the strong requirements for retail at the ground floors along H Street, with multiple entrances and a variety of uses. This is important to avoid blank walls and provide a more engaging pedestrian experience that is often lacking on some commercial streets in downtown D.C. An interesting set of ground floor uses, along with vibrant uses above and behind, will help turn the H Street overpass into a street that just feels like a hill instead of just a commuter throughway.

Thanks to the raised height of this zone, 130 feet versus 90 feet, and the measuring point of H Street in front of the air rights lots, this development will have a visually interesting massing, with multiple minor streets and alleys throughout the development. The 130 foot height, combined with the 6.5 FAR, will by definition require a varied site massing.

I have absolutely no objection to buildings rising 130 feet above H Street in the USN zone, precisely because the maximum FAR remains at a modest 6.5. If the measuring point was changed so that the effective allowable height was only 70 or 90 feet above H Street, it would seriously jeopardize my support because the developer is far more likely to build a series of large unarticulated boxes to maximize the allowable development area. This is a common theme for buildings in NoMA and downtown, and the new USN zoning will not allow for that type of development. The proposed height-FAR combination is therefore appropriate for this site.

I strongly urge the Commission to approve the USN Zone for the air rights lots North of Union Station, to help improve the vitality of our neighborhood, and help connect our area of Northeast DC to other nearby neighborhoods in the District. This is an important step towards this process, and I am looking forward to my future walks along H Street and into Union Station.

Thank you for your time.



Tony Goodman