



Coalition for Smarter Growth

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Testimony before the DC Zoning Commission regarding

Support for ZC 14-08
PUD for 1441-1449 U Street NW, Portner Place

By Cheryl Cort, Policy Director
October 27, 2014

Please accept these comments on behalf of the Coalition for Smarter Growth (CSG). The Coalition for Smarter Growth is the leading organization working locally in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan region dedicated to making the case for smart growth. Our mission is to promote walkable, inclusive, and transit-oriented communities, and the land use and transportation policies and investments needed to make those communities flourish.

We wish to express our support for the Portner Place project which will replace and add affordable housing, along with market rate housing and ground floor retail in a way that enhances U and V Streets, NW, and respects the historic district. Driven by the Portner Place Tenants Association, this project will replace existing tenants' homes with new ones, and add new affordable units for a total of 96 homes, along with amenities that serve the families and seniors of this existing community such as a rooftop community room, playground, community garden, and computer room. To help fund the replacement and doubling of affordable housing, the Tenants Association is supporting the addition of a second wing to the building to face the busy U Street corridor, and provide ground floor retail and 270 market rate residences above.

We applaud this innovative project led by the Portner Place Tenants Association as an outstanding contribution to the U Street neighborhood. Not only did the Portner Place Tenants manage to save their homes through a Tenant Opportunity to Purchase Act (TOPA) action, they doubled the affordable housing opportunities with family-oriented units and amenities. This proposal also restores the pedestrian-scale fabric of the V Street and U Street blocks with buildings that relate to their streets, provide front-facing entrances, and offer ground floor retail on U Street.

I have attended many of the community meetings to discuss and review this proposal, as I live 2 blocks north of the site. I've had the benefit of hearing from the Portner Place Tenants Association whose members have attended all of the community meetings that I have attended to voice their support for their project. I'm proud to say that the neighborhood has been overwhelmingly supportive of our neighbors who live at Portner Place, and their plans to renew their homes and create such an innovative project. The project is an exciting example of what an empowered Tenants Association can do armed with the TOPA law. They have worked together for hours to put together a strategy and to select a talented development team to deliver to them new homes and new amenities in their own neighborhood.

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CSG in support of ZC 14-08 Portner Place

With the expiration of many federal subsidy contracts, and the turnover of unsubsidized housing to new owners and high rents, this renewal and doubling of affordable housing opportunities in the vibrant, transit-accessible 14th & U Street neighborhood is a major accomplishment. We also welcome the 270 market rate units which will help pay for the affordable homes, and address the surging demand to live in the city. All these housing units help DC address its housing needs in one of the most desirable places to live in the city.

Thank you for your consideration.