

Re: CASE NO. 14-18 (Mid-City Financial Corporation - 1st Stage PUD & Related Map Amendment at Squares 3953, 3954, 4024, & 4025)

To whom it may concern,

We are residents of the Brookland/Woodridge area of NE DC. We drive every day on Rhode Island Avenue, and are distinctly impacted by the developments on it. Rhode Island Ave at this point is quite bedraggled and depressed. Bringing and encouraging good, careful, thoughtful development of the Avenue that creates a main street feel on it is a high priority for us and our neighbors

Mid City Financial, the owner of the large lot in question, came to our ANC-5B meeting on February 25 and presented their plans. Although they were generous with their time, we would like to ask that your commission impose certain changes on their plan before approval since there will be very little opportunity for our community to help shape the proposal if zoning changes are allowed.

DC planners have been planning a revitalization of Rhode Island Avenue for nearly a decade, designating Rhode Island Avenue one of its "Great Streets." DC has developed an overall plan for the Avenue, called *The Diamond of the District*. We would like to request that you obligate Mid-City Financial to take this plan into account, and to take the general architecture and scale of the area into consideration as specified in that plan.

In *The Diamond of the District* plan, on page 32, the following are some of the suggestions for how to go about revitalizing RIA and turning it into a vital, lively and better-functioning mixed use residential and commercial district. The guidelines in this plan are exactly on target and should be the guiding light for all major development to come to the Avenue. Since the development proposed by Mid-City Financial on Rhode Island Avenue would dwarf the scale of existing buildings, it is crucial that this huge development get the issue of proportionality and human scale right. I draw your attention particularly to the repeated emphasis on building in ways that are consonant with the local architecture, drawing from local vernaculars, making new construction "fit in" to existing neighborhood scale.

1. Set all buildings directly on the front property lines along Rhode Island Avenue and secondary arterials and on other side streets or alleys where architecturally possible;
2. Use the full depth of the corridors generally narrow or odd shaped lots and not build rear yards unless the property line is within 20 feet of a residential zone or single family home;
3. **Mass and scale new construction to "fit in" or architecturally reference existing neighborhood scale;**
4. Achieve a three-part facade arrangement with base, body, and cornice in all structures, particularly structures over three stories;

5. Have a clearly articulated base at least two stories in height and an articulated and expressive cornice in structures over three stories;
6. Integrate details and rhythms at the first two to three stories of the building which will be in pedestrian and transit view;
7. Avoid flat facades/elevations by incorporating bay windows, balconies and other forms of surface articulation;
8. Avoid unarticulated blank walls adjacent to public spaces;
9. Employ modern and innovative design interpretations of local and neighborhood architecture without being overly historicist

Upon reflection, we have the following responses to this proposal as it now stands:

1. We are supportive of development, and wish to see the current Brookland Manor redeveloped in a manner that enhances the surrounding communities.
2. The height of the proposed buildings on RIA is far, far too tall. There are no other such buildings on RIA, they are not harmonious with the area and they would not make a walkable main street of Rhode Island Avenue. The only other tall buildings on Rhode Island Avenue are 5 stories tall, including some beautiful old Art Deco buildings which should be the point of reference for this project. The Great Streets plan calls for building off of existing assets such as already present notable architecture and 'human scale' of the place as it now stands. We echo this call.
3. We would like the developers to consider pushing the highest buildings further into their lot, and having the buildings that face RIA be of more medium height, no taller than 5 stories. (Maintain the existing zoning of lots fronting RIA, or limit height to 50 feet overlooking the Avenue). This would be better for sunlight on the street and sidewalk, more consistent with existing "asset" (beautiful) buildings on RIA, and much more likely to encourage walkability. We strongly urge that you do not allow the developers to build up to NINE stories facing Rhode Island Avenue, where their buildings will tower over everything, taking away from the "human scale" of the neighborhood and possibly preventing it from ever attaining a human-scale main street feel. We seek a requirement that the buildings be "stepped back" so that the tallest buildings are not at the front, but are more in the center, allowing the density the developers need while not forever disrupting the architectural flow of that part of RIA.
4. Nothing about the current design or the intent of the developers appears to be geared toward making Rhode Island Avenue into a better, more walkable, livable main street, a heart of the larger community. We appreciate the developer's goal of making Brookland Manor safer, and bringing more retail to an underserved community, but their proposed plan at present--especially with their request of changed height limits fronting Rhode Island Avenue—suggests that this "great street" RIA will actually suffer from this development, rather than benefit. We need them to

guarantee that they will situate walkable, human-scale retail spaces on their property on RIA that would enhance the Avenue, not tower coldly above it for the profit of the developers at the cost of the main street and its residents and denizens.

5. The developers appear to have shown us, residents of ANC 5B, their plan, without actually asking us for feedback. This is likely to be one of the last chances that we, the people who will have to live with this development for decades to come, will have to impact the final shape and outcome of this project. We strongly object to changing the zoning and thus the height limit on parcels fronting Rhode Island Avenue.

We therefore ask you to NOT allow the requested re-zoning of building on Rhode Island Avenue but instead require that Mid Century 1. reduce the height of the buildings fronting RIA; 2. build both retail and "walkability" into their plans for structures facing RIA; and 3. account for architectural idioms found on RIA with the few beautiful Art Deco-era buildings that are situated a few blocks further east on the Avenue.

We believe that only with smart development that is informed by the research of urban planners can great streets function as thriving, walkable main streets, thereby enhancing the safety and livability of all neighborhoods abutting them.

We sincerely appreciate your consideration.



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