

Testimony for the April 2, 2015 hearing on the Walter Reed Zoning Proposals
Wendy Blake-Coleman-Resident of Shepard Park
1410 Holly Street
Washington DC 20012

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I am a Shepard Park resident who has attended many Walter Reed Development meetings since 2011. I am generally supportive of the proposed development and associated zoning for the Walter Reed Campus. In most cases, the Office of Planning and Economic Development has taken great care to reflect the concerns of the affected neighbors and ensure the change to the character of adjoining neighborhoods are minimally impacted.

The exception to this observation is the parcel/lot labeled WR8 at the corner of 16th and Aspen Streets. Here the proposed zoning designation of PROS/medium density, as depicted in the proposed document "ZC 14 XX Walter Reed Chapter 35 section 3508," is allowing construction of a 5 story apartment building. This zoning allows a structure that could cover a maximum of 80% of the steeply sloped, currently a tree lined open/green space, lot resulting in a maximum FAR of 3.25. This designation is in an area zoned R-1 which is one-family detached dwellings and subdivided as either R-1-A low density or R-1-B high density on 16th Street and most of Aspen Street. There is a small area zoned R-5 which is general residence, subdivided as R-5-A low density now apartments 3-4 stories on Aspen and down 14th Street.

The building characteristics described for WR8 are the maximum building parameters allowed, but not mandatory under the proposed zoning category. However, the developer with the support of the Office of Planning and Economic Development, has made it clear in their public presentations that they intend to develop to the maximum extent allowed under this zoning classification. This response is despite repeated concerns raised by citizens and some members of the ANC 4A re the corner of 16th and Aspen Streets. The Office of Planning and Economic Development responded in July 2012 on concerns raised by me about the WR8 designation and the impact such a zoning designation would have on the 16th Street corridor as follows (full text of my comments and their response are at the end of this written testimony:

- The site has significant infrastructure needs of upwards of \$140 million, including 14+ acres of dedicated open space throughout the site. As a result, it is imperative that proposed development be able to leverage the right opportunities in order to allow development to move forward on the site, rather than having the site remain vacant or underdeveloped.
- Residential uses, in particular, are very important to the financial viability of the site, and must be situated in a way that best meets market demand and creates the best sense of place on site in order to fund the necessary infrastructure investment and to support other amenities and uses on the site, such as retail and open space.
- The site at 16th and Aspen Streets has been identified by developers and our consultants as one of the most attractive residential development locations on the Walter Reed site, due to its proximity to Rock Creek Park and to the strong existing adjacent residential neighborhood, and its access to the City and regional transportation network. Other locations on the site, such as the mixed-use center on the northeast corner of the site, provide residential opportunities, but none provide the same residential character to the opportunity at 16th and Aspen Streets.

Please note that nowhere in the response do they address neighborhood concerns raised, especially at the 2011 meeting in Shepard Park attended by over 100 people most of whom emphasized they did not want the character of their neighborhood changed. In addition, there is no mention of the goal to minimize changes to the character of a neighborhood and to have as much open space as possible on the site, or having a gateway to Rock Creek Park.

A full set of my comments on the Small Area Plan in 2012 including several options for shifting the density to allow the continuation of the unique open/green space characteristics of WR8 as well as the Office of Planning and Economic Development responses are provided at the end of this document. Please include them as part of my testimony.

After much dialogue, the WR8 designation in the Small Area Management Plan was changed from a medium density to Proposed Open Space (PROS)/Medium Density. The hope had been PROS/Moderate density or PROS/low density to better reflect the character of the 16th Street corridor. There is a statement re WR 8 in the November 21, 2014 memorandum to the District of Columbia Zoning Commission from Jennifer Steingasser titled "Setdown Report for a Proposed Text and Map Amendment (ZC 14-) Create New Zoning for the District's Portion of the Walter Reed Campus." In this memorandum, Section IV Walter Reed Army Medical Center Small Area Plan states "The land use and character of each zone can be characterized as follows.....WR8-Residential with a **significant green component.**" **A medium density designation that allows a 5 story building covering up to 80% of the lot does not fit the description outlined in the November 21, 2014 memorandum.**

Again, this level of development is totally out of character with neighborhood covering the entire span of 16th Street from the Circle at 16th and Colesville beyond the WR campus to Military Road. This entire span is designated as either R-1A or R-1B with the WR-8 lot designated as R1-B in the official zoning map. It should be noted that where there is an apartment house at 6101 16th Street, the Rittenhouse Apartments, there is a setback of at least 185 feet from 16th street. This set back is zoned R-1-B. A similar setback is in place for apartments on Luzone Avenue and Somerset Place apartments which have setbacks of @ 100 feet from 16th street. The land serving as the setback on both these properties is designated R-1-B zones. If this set back precedent for apartments is followed for WR8, the size the WRS lot does not allow medium density development for this site.

- In addition, the topography of the site, a steep hill will be totally destroyed should a building of the size being constructed. It should be noted that after their Environmental Impact Assessment the Department of State has chosen not to develop structures on their part of this hill and to leave it as an open space. It seems that this pristine land, a gate way to the park should be left as open and green as possible. The long rectangular flat area at the top of the hill running along the eastern border of WR8 would be perfectly suited for the dog park that many Shepard Park residents have been requesting on the site.

Zoning Recommendations

I am requesting that the Zoning Board consider:

- At a minimum, reducing the maximum area of the W8 lot that can be developed from 80% down to 60% to reflect section 3541 Green Area ratio (which is in section 3541.1) that states in WR-2, WR-3, W-4, WR5, WR 7, and WR8 ones the GAR requirement is .4 pursuant to Chapter 34 of this title.

- If a medium density is retained, adhere to the precedent with other apartment buildings on 16th street that there be a minimum set back of 100 feet from the 16th Street corridor. This will ensure that the character of 16th street be maintained and that a building appropriate for the amount of land in WR8 is built.
- Consider the recommendations on shifting the density of the residential districts in the WR area per the recommendations provided in 2012 to the Office of Planning and Economic Development (See the end of this document). This allows the developer to maintain a density that enables them to fund the necessary infrastructure investment for WR while allowing density such as PROS, R-1-B or R2 more suitable for the corner of 16th and Aspen Streets. For example the number of town houses along Fern Street has already been increased significantly; see our suggestions on other shifting of dwellings to ensure the costs associated with infrastructure could be attained without inappropriately building on WR8.
- Delay the W8 zoning designation until the appropriate density for this lot, based on focused neighbor input on W8 is obtained preferably through the CAC process. It is amazing how many people are still shocked when they find out that a 5 story apartment building is designated for this corner. In fact on 04/01/15 a neighbor on Orchard Street Road had this shocked reaction when told and added that will change the character of the whole neighborhood. This lack of knowledge is not a fault of the Office of Planning and Economic Development, but rather as one neighbor said we have all been guilty of not paying attention especially as most of the residents are focused on the Georgia Ave corridor and the demolition of the old WR hospital.

Comments provided by Wendy Blake-Coleman re density in WR8 to the Office of Planning and Economic Development in 2012 and responses.

From: eharri@aol.com [mailto:eharri@aol.com]

Sent: Tuesday, July 10, 2012 3:55 PM

To: Abernathy, Malaika (OP); eharri@aol.com; quepuppy@aol.com

Subject: Comments from June 26th Small area Planning Meeting Session at the Shepard Park Elementary School

Hi Ms. Abernathy: I attended the public meeting re the proposed Walter Reed Small Area Plan at the Shepard Park elementary School on June 26th. I had a lot of comments on the proposed 5 story, 200 family unit on the corner of 16th and Aspen Street. I was told by DC staff to write up my comments for the record and send them on to the blond contractor. I have misplaced her name and card so I am sending this on to you in hopes that you will provide the information to all the correct DC Government staff and the contractor for consideration. Please note there is a comment on the transportation Study- which was written prior to me looking at your agenda for the next Small Area Planning session at Tiferth Israel on the 12th. Thanks for the opportunity to comment. Please contact me at either eharri@aol.com or 202-320-6540 if you have questions or need additional information. Wendy Blake-Coleman 1410 Holly Street

Concerns about the proposed 5 story, 200 family Unit on the corner of 16th and Aspen Streets

Four Shepard Park and Brightwood residents and Steve Whately 4A ANC Commissioner (also a resident) told both the consultant and the DC staff present at the June 26 Small Area Planning Public Outreach Session that we objected to having the corner of 16th and Aspen Streets designated as a medium density residential area within the Small Area Plan. We told them that the preferred designation is open space. I indicated that if the site can't be re-designated as open space that at a minimum it should be re-designated as a low residential density like the rest of the residential plots for 16 blocks north of the Walter Reed site to the Silver Spring border and six blocks south to Butternut Rd. We were told by DC staff that the type and density designations on the small area plans were suggestions and planning guides and that they indeed could be changed to another designation.

In addition to the land use designation types on 16th and Aspen Streets, all four residents and ANC 4A Commissioner Steve Whately (also a resident) opposed the proposed 5 story, 200 family unit for this corner. The foot print as depicted on all of the small area plans would leave minimal open space between the Charter School and 16th Street and would necessitate a large amount of bulldozing of the land which is a moderate slope and has many tree plantings. Our objections include but are not limited to the following:

1. Such a zoning and building do no comport with:

- a. All single family residences for 16 blocks of 16th Street north of the Walter Reed Hospital Site
- b. All single family residences for 6 blocks of 16th Street south (to Butternut Street) of the Walter Reed Hospital site
- c. All single family residences on the block opposite the site on Aspen Street (the resident at 16th and Aspen who was not at this meeting, but at an earlier meeting, also objects to this 5 story building)

2. Such zoning and building do not comport with:

- a. The 4 religious buildings on the 16 blocks of 16th Street to the north of the Walter Reed Hospital to the Silver Spring Border

- 1. Tifereth Israel Synagogue is 2 stories with basement rooms
- 2. The National Synagogue is two stories with a basement rooms
- 3. The Ethical Society is one story with basement rooms
- 4. The First United Church of Jesus Christ is two stories with basement rooms

- b. The Jewish Primary day school which is 2 stories high

3. The foot print of the 5 story building as it appears on the small area plan does not comport with the multi- story buildings that are 6 and then again 9 blocks south of the Walter Reed Hospital Site which have a lot of green space facing 16th street.

- a. The 2 sets of 4 story apartments near Somerset and 16th are set back @ 160 feet from 16th

- Street (an estimate based on walking will need to go back to get the exact measurement)
- b. The Rittenhouse apartment 9 stories are set back even further than the ones near Somerset and has a very large open space facing 16th street.

A few other thoughts:

1. It is our understanding that the current re-zoning efforts under way are per the order of the Mayor, striving to be consistent with current neighborhood zoning and will retain the current look and feel of the current neighborhood. A 5 story, 200 family unit at the corner of 16th and Aspen does not fit into the character of the neighborhoods that border 16th street.
2. It is our understanding that part of the mayor's plan for sustainability in the District is to retain and develop strategically placed open spaces. Why would one want to eliminate a beautiful open space along 16th street, the gateway to the city, that could serve both charter schools abutting the site and serve as a park for the 1900 families in Shepard Park and the equally large community in Brightwood? After this piece of land was initially turned over to the city from the Department of State, it was intimated that this piece of land would also serve as a gateway into the newly developed site a gateway linking Rock Creek Park to the development. A 5 story, 200 Unit building does not seem to be that gateway.
3. In the fall of 2011, there was a large community meeting at the National Synagogue to discuss the Walter Reed Hospital Site Redevelopment. Approximately 110 community members, a substantial number of them from Shepard Park and many who have lived in the neighborhood for over 30 years, were present. In an opinion vote, 60-70 percent indicated that they did not want the character of the neighborhood to change. A 5 story building for 200 families drastically changes the character of both the 16th Street corridor and by extension the Shepard Park neighborhood. This statistic was never reflected in any of the presentations that I have attended subsequently (and that has been many) and does not seem to be taken into account for the proposed building on the 16th and Aspen Street corner.
- 4 Another major concern raised by attendees at the planning meetings, by citizens from Shepard Park, Brightwood, 16th Street Heights, and Crestwood, is the impact on traffic particularly from the 200 unit building on the corner of 16th and Aspen in tandem with the State Department plans. Although a large number of neighbors indicate traffic issues exist now, we are continually told by DC officials that traffic studies indicate there are no issues and traffic load is decreasing. The DC government staff has not yet provided documentation of the facts they state from these studies to citizens. It is also not clear that the 16th street traffic studies have considered the cumulative impact of both the embassies and a 200 family unit.

Some Recommended Alternatives

The residents and ANC Commissioner strongly recommended to both the contractor and the DC government staff at the last small area meeting that the 200 family unit not be placed at the corner of 16th and Aspen, but instead units for 200 families be redistributed to other more suitable parts of the Walter Reed Hospital Site that are designated for residential or mixed uses. I suggested some of the following possibilities to the DC staff and contractor at that meeting.

1. Increase the density of the residential unit(s) on the corner of Georgia and Aspen by making this a six story building as there is already a six story building, the Normandie, on Georgia Ave in the block across the street from the site and the block on Aspen street across from the site consist of 4 story apartments except for one single family house toward 13th street.

2. Use the maximum density suggested for housing units within the interior of the site .The contractor indicated that there was an option of making these buildings 4-6 stories. I recommended making buildings M, N, K, and H 6 stories as necessary to help redistribute the 200 families originally recommended for the corner of 16th and Aspen. If necessary, add a 7th story to building K which abuts the State Department Land and is set very far back from any residential units on Fern street.

3. Take the square building A now on Fern Street and move it back to Elder Street and reorient it to a rectangle building so 2 additional units can be added. This moves the community garden from Elder Street to Fern Street next to the other community garden designated on Fern street with increased density while providing open space on Fern street.

4. Consider reconfiguring buildings W, X, and Y on Aspen Street between 14th Place and Luzon Street to slightly increasing density while keeping the height.

5. Consider reconfiguring the driveway entrances to Building 14 and putting in 2-4 townhouses on Main Street.

**Response on Tuesday, April 9, 2013, Abernathy, Malaika (OP) emailed Arquetta Anderson
Commissioner of 4A01:**

Commissioner,

Thanks for your concern regarding community input and transparency. As you may not be aware, the planning process for developing the Small Area Plan and the Reuse Plan has been extremely interactive and engaging with residents in the surrounding community. Since 2009 numerous public and LRA meetings were held to develop the SAP and Base Reuse Plan recommendations. During the process, we received many opinions about how the Walter Reed Site can be developed over the next 20 years. In developing the plan we attempt to balance community desires with our professional expertise and planning analysis conducted during the process. The SAP reflects the best approach to a balanced redevelopment framework.

Regarding Ms. Blake-Coleman's concern about the Aspen Street residential mix, our analysis has indicated this is the best use for the southwestern portion of the site.

- The site has significant infrastructure needs of upwards of \$140 million, including 14+ acres of dedicated open space throughout the site. As a result, it is imperative that proposed development be able to leverage the right opportunities in order to allow development to move forward on the site, rather than having the site remain vacant or underdeveloped.
- Residential uses, in particular, are very important to the financial viability of the site, and must be situated in a way that best meets market demand and creates the best sense of place on site in order to fund the necessary infrastructure investment and to support other amenities and uses on the site, such as retail and open space.
- The site at 16th and Aspen Streets has been identified by developers and our consultants as one of the most attractive residential development locations on the Walter Reed site, due to its proximity to

Rock Creek Park and to the strong existing adjacent residential neighborhood, and its access to the City and regional transportation network. Other locations on the site, such as the mixed-use center on the northeast corner of the site, provide residential opportunities, but none provide the same residential character to the opportunity at 16th and Aspen Streets.

- Significant portions of the site in other locations have been dedicated to open space to maximize aesthetics, provide community amenities, and support marketability of residential and other development on the site.
- The proposed height of the building (between 4-5 stories) can be supported. The SAP recommends specific urban design guidance to ensure that new development is compatible to the existing character of the surrounding neighborhood.

I've already shared with both of you the public comment digest addressing all comments received during the public comment period of the plan. Ms. Blake-Coleman's concerns are part of that document and OP provided an additional response. She should forward her comments to Council Chairman Mendelson's office to be part of the official record before it closes tomorrow on April 9. Forward your concerns to Jessica Jacobs, Committee of the Whole at 724-8038 or e-mail: jjacobs@dccouncil.us.
Ms Abernathy,

Email response from Wendy Blake-Coleman back to Commissioner Arquette Anderson on April 9, 2013
Dear Ms. Anderson: Thanks for sending on my comments to the Office of Planning and asking for a response. This is the first time I have felt listened to and/or supported by a commissioner on the ANC 4A. I must say I am not surprised by Ms. Abernathy's answer which is basically there is no alternative to developing (or as she says under developing) that corner. **It is my opinion that our alternatives to help ensure that there is income coming in to support infrastructure were not adequately addressed unless they have analyzed them and put the answers to that analysis some where I have not seen them.** Now that we know this is a 4-5 story building versus a 5-7 it seems the options for dispersing the people who might have inhabited this part of the site to other portions of the site to cover the infrastructure costs seems even more plausible. I hope that instead of letting them develop this corner as one of the highest priorities within a year and a half after the land is transferred - which is what they say their schedule is - citizens are able to have a say in how this corner is developed and really assess whether moving folks to other parts of the campus is viable. I am not against development on the site, but it seems their minds were made up about the corner of 16th and Aspen a long time before they started engaging the community on this particular issue.

I will be flying home at the time of your meeting on the 17th. If I can finish up in Connecticut and catch an earlier plane I will. In any case I am willing to help you out on all of this in any way you need. My cell is 202-320-6540. I do not know how many folks (new folks) will be at your meeting on the 17th, but I would be interested in knowing how many realize that they intend to put an apartment building on the corner of Aspen and 16th streets- most folks I talk to seem unaware. The ones I talk to are opposed, but maybe the majority are OK with this change I am not sure that we have had that discussion.

My great, great, grandfather was stationed in DC during part of his service in the Civil War and I have been perturbed by what I consider the lack of consideration for this and other sites in the area. Again I appreciate your actions taken on this matter. Best Wishes WBC.