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Shepherd Park Citizens Association
Comments on Proposed Walter Reed Zoning
July 23, 2015

Mr. Chairman and members of the Zoning Commission, we at the Shepherd Park Citizens Association continue to support the overall vision for new development proposed for the former Walter Reed site. We firmly believe that more options for affordable and market rate housing in a variety of styles including "townhomes" and apartment should be offered to District residents. We eagerly look forward to shopping at new, high-quality retail establishments and attending new cultural and recreational offerings near our neighborhood.

Unfortunately, we are disappointed to observe that the proposed zoning regulations for the two areas with the most impact on our neighborhood do not meet our expectations and, in our view, are not in accordance with the Small Area Plan approved by the City Council on April 30, 2013.

We noted in our testimony to the Commission on April 2, 2015 that we believe the proposed WR-1 zoning does not meet the goals stated in the Walter Reed Army Medical Center Small Area Plan. The Small Area Plan states: "With new townhomes proposed along 12th, 13th, Elder and Fern Streets, the vision and character of this sub-area pays homage to the existing low-density uses proposed in the Town Center." In our view, the amount of townhouses and flats allowed under the proposed zoning is too dense and way out of proportion with our neighborhood. The proposed zoning would cram 90 "townhouses" and "flats" on a three acre site. This level is significantly denser than a comparable development that recently opened in downtown Silver Spring with 63 "townhomes" on a five acre site. If the WR-1 site were developed at a comparable density, there would be around 40 units built there.

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Additionally, the proposed 16 feet width for "affordable" housing (section 3501.4) is disgraceful, in our opinion. We believe that there should be no mandated distinguishing features between "affordable" and "market" rate housing. Furthermore, we believe the lack of a rear yard requirement is out of scale with the existing neighborhood. And the parking provisions for residents and their guests are not clearly spelled out.

We sincerely believe that this sub-area, if developed at this proposed density would negatively impact traffic, parking, property values and our overall quality of life. We request again that this section be redrafted to downzone for forty "townhomes" and "flats" with a maximum height of three stories, front porches, and a variety of designs compatible with our neighborhood.

We have similar concerns for the proposed zoning designation W-3, Land Bay A.2, at the corner of Fern Street and Georgia Avenue. According to the chart on page 15 of the proposed regulations, a five-story "mixed use" building could be constructed there. However, the Council approved Small Area Plan states: "The building frontage along Georgia Avenue would reflect the current conditions on the opposite side of the street in order to blend in with the existing community." At the present time there is not a five-story building across Georgia Avenue; rather, there is a two story building used as a church. We request that this section be rewritten to reduce the allowable height to three stories with retail on the ground floor.

As we pointed out in our opening comments, we support the overall vision of a revitalized Walter Reed site. We desire development that lasts, development that creates a sense of place, a sense of timelessness: development that after 20 or 30 years looks just as fresh and inviting to residents and visitors as it does the day it was built. We support building a real neighborhood. We can accomplish this task if the proposed regulations were amended as we request.