

January 3, 2019

Jason Mitchell
4704 Warren St. NW
Washington, DC 20016

Mr. Anthony Hood, Chairman
District of Columbia Zoning Commission
441 4th Street NW, Suite 210S
Washington, DC 20001

RE: Letter in Opposition: Case Number 16-23, Proposal for Design Review and Development by Valor Development, LLC, Square 1499, Lots 802, 803, 806, 807, in American University Park, District of Columbia

Dear Chairman Hood and Members of the Commission:

I live at 4704 Warren Street NW, around the corner from the proposed development of the site of the former SuperFresh grocery store at 4330 48th Street NW. I write again to express my opposition to Valor Development's proposal.

Valor's proposed development threatens many problems that would irreparably harm our community. I will focus on just one of them, but I share my neighbors' concerns about the traffic and proposed traffic pattern that will endanger members of this community, parking impacts, school impacts, and threats to long-established local businesses, to name a few.

The most obvious problem with Valor's development is that it is completely out of character with DC's Comprehensive Plan as well as the surrounding neighborhood—both residential and commercial—in its size and scope. That is the primary driver of all of the issues with the proposal, and Valor's current plan is essentially the same in terms of overall size as the last plan, but even more monolithic in its massing.

There is only one building in the area anywhere close to the size of the structures Valor is proposing: the old American University Law School building at 4801 Massachusetts Avenue, which the University is currently using for a mix of administrative and classroom purposes. It is an outlier – it was permitted to exceed allowable density when it was built by borrowing density from the neighboring historic Spring Valley Shopping Center.

Every other building within many blocks in every direction is either a single-family home or is a residential or commercial building that is consistent with the Comprehensive Plan, which calls for one-to-three story structures in the area, including commercial buildings. All of the commercial buildings on both sides of Massachusetts Avenue in the area—including the existing SuperFresh site, the historic Spring Valley Shopping Center, and the recently redeveloped section of the thriving commercial area directly across Mass. Ave.—are consistent with the Comprehensive Plan.

It bears repeating that both the American University building and Spring Valley Shopping Center are both located on Massachusetts Avenue, a commercial street, whereas Valor's proposed development is not. It fronts the residential streets Yuma and 48th and relies upon them almost exclusively to handle the traffic impacts caused by the site. But the proposal will also have the practical effect of dwarfing the historic Spring Valley shopping center on Mass Ave., which, thanks to the American University building using its density, is locked into its current size. While the neighbors would like to see that space put to use, Valor's proposed development is simply much too large for the neighborhood, and puts far too much strain on the residential streets of single-family homes that front it on all sides.

When Valor's prior application was heard, this Commission rightfully questioned whether Valor could provide renderings comparing the size of its proposed development to the neighboring homes. I do not believe Valor has provided those renderings, as they would show how much the proposed structure would dwarf everything in the immediate vicinity of the building, including the current sole outlier. To provide context, the surrounding 15 blocks of the neighborhood that will be most impacted are currently home to approximately the same number of people, combined, that Valor is proposing to house within a single block in the proposed development. The amount of density Valor is proposing might make sense in other parts of the city, or might make sense if it utilized Massachusetts Avenue—not streets like Yuma, 48th, Warren, Windom, and 49th—to absorb more of its traffic. It does not make sense in the proposed location.

I strongly oppose Valor's current plan and respectfully urge the Zoning Commission to recommend that Valor rework their proposal to ensure consistency with the DC Comprehensive Plan for this area. There are potential mixed commercial/residential developments that could work on this property while remaining consistent with both the Comprehensive Plan and the surrounding neighborhood. But Valor's proposed development is much too large for the space it intends to occupy, and Valor should not be granted density exceptions to go forward in its present configuration.

Thank you for your attention and consideration of my concerns.

Sincerely,



Jason Mitchell
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