

**Testimony of Sondra L. Mills in Opposition to
Case No. 16-23, Proposal for Design Review and Development by
Valor Development, LLC, Square 1499, Lots 802, 803, 806, 807**

For 12-1/2 years, I have lived in AU Park on the 4800 block of Alton Place, N.W., approximately a block and a half from the proposed project. Valor's revised proposal for this development includes few changes from its previous plans. I have reviewed the many factual and legal arguments submitted both for and against the project and invite the Commissioners to step back and consider two questions:

- (1) Does this project benefit the AU Park community?
- (2) Does this project benefit the District of Columbia as a whole?

I believe that the answer to both questions is no.

(1) No real benefits to the AU Park neighborhood community: Valor's proposal would bring a sea change to AU Park. The neighborhood consists almost entirely of two story, single family homes. The peaceful, low density character of the community attracts young families. The children can walk to school and play in the streets, and many parents choose to age in place after their children are grown. The proposed 219 unit apartment building brings no benefit to the neighborhood and in fact greatly diminishes it:

- The proposed 4-6 story structure is just too big for the neighborhood. It overshadows the two story homes that face the building and the adjacent historically landmarked Spring Valley Shopping center.
- The development will eliminate at least three long-established, locally owned businesses, including a popular restaurant, a hair salon, and the kitchens for the famous Wagshal's delicatessen, restaurant, meat and seafood market as well as its catering establishment. Sixty jobs would be eliminated.
- The proposal does not provide for adequate parking, which will flow into the neighboring streets. The traffic generated by the grocery store and 219 or more apartments will cause dangerous congestion on the neighboring streets and alleys.

Valor's claimed benefits to the community are illusory:

- The much vaunted full service grocery store that Valor has promised will be included in the project is frankly a phantom. Valor continues to negotiate with grocers and claims to have two letters of intent from Balducci's and Mom's Organic. There is still no commitment from either of these stores, and neither of them is a full-service grocer in any

event. This is hardly a grocery desert. There are already many grocery stores in the area, and a new Wegman's will be going into the former Fannie Mae site.

- The proposed "hawk light" on Massachusetts Ave. will invite pedestrians into what will be a dangerous alley crowded with trucks and cars and is unnecessary given the two traffic lights and cross-walks at 48th and 49th Streets. No doubt it would lead to traffic back-ups on Massachusetts Ave.
- The purported creation of "affordable housing" is virtually non-existent. The vast bulk of the apartments will be rented out at "market rate," very likely to AU students.
- The development brings no meaningful public space to the community.

(2) No Benefits to the District as a whole: Valor's proposal represents a cynical effort to avoid its responsibilities to the District overall:

- The proposed development does little, if anything, to advance the District's goal of increasing affordable housing. When Valor's initial proposal fell short of satisfying the Inclusionary Zoning requirements, Valor revised its plans to *minimize* the number of affordable housing units it would have to offer. Rather than redesign the project to provide more affordable units, Valor instead resorted to the trick of sinking the apartment building into the ground by 6 – 8 feet to circumvent the IZ requirements.
- The proposed development diminishes the historically landmarked Spring Valley Shopping Center and the locally owned businesses housed within it. While Valor must "borrow" density from the shopping center to do this project, it seeks to avoid the accompanying historic preservation responsibilities.
- The development creates a towering structure that violates the Height Act.
- Valor's attempt to bend the "Design Review" process to permit this project would render the governing regulations meaningless.

For the foregoing reasons, I respectfully request that the Zoning Commission reject Valor's proposal. It represents a misuse of the District's zoning laws to achieve purely private financial gain at the expense of the AU Park neighborhood and the District as a whole.