

**Testimony of Mr. John A. Thorner  
Westmoreland Citizens Association**

**Before the  
Zoning Commission of the District of Columbia  
January 24, 2019**

Good evening. My name is John Thorner and I am here representing the Westmoreland Citizens Association (or WCA). I am here at the request of WCA President Celia Martin. Thank you for the opportunity to testify this evening and to submit an initial letter on December 27. The WCA, founded in 1936, consists of 1000 households on both sides of Massachusetts Avenue on the MD side of Westmoreland Circle.

We oppose Valor Development's plan for a 4-6 story, mixed use building on the site of the former SuperFresh grocery located at 4330 48th St., NW. Simply put, residents of our 1,000 homes use Massachusetts Avenue as the main commuting artery into downtown D.C.. We believe this development will exacerbate existing traffic congestion, making an intolerable situation worse.

Additionally, residents of our 1,000 homes also shop and dine at the new and previously existing stores and restaurants in the area. Many undergraduate, graduate, and seniors also attend classes and lectures at American University's Spring Valley Building. Parking in this area for these existing uses already is woefully inadequate.

Even if this project ultimately is approved, we ask the Commission to pay close attention to entries, access and exits to ensure that significant additional traffic and parking congestion is averted. In this regard, it might be useful hto give a sense of current conditions.

The Exxon gas station at the corner of the Spring Valley Shopping Center is the only one along the commuter corridor until reaching downtown DC. So this gas station is popular. Entering the gas station on the side of Mass. Ave. heading into the District from Bethesda is tricky, and requires a left turn, then a quick right. The entry is narrow, so if a car is exiting, passage is stalled, which also stalls one lane of Massachusetts Avenue. The other driver option is to make a right turn, loop through the neighborhood, and backtrack onto Massachusetts Ave at the very intersection of development we're considering tonight: at 48<sup>th</sup> Street. There is no left turn arrow and the new residents exiting their homes would make that left turn more difficult, backing up traffic at the side roads of that intersection. With either driver option, the number of units of the proposed development would exacerbate this traffic issue for our commuters, and local DC residents.

Outside commuting hours, there is robust activity at the shops along this area of Massachusetts Avenue. Parking spots out front and around back are usually filled. With an additional 200+ seats of restaurants and coffee shops now, or coming, the high demand for parking will continue. Please look closely at the two-year-old data and then request updated data to include fully loaded additional seats; it will give a different evaluation of strain on traffic and parking.

WCA members use the hair salon, the restaurant, and the caterer, located in the area cited for redevelopment. Under the proposed development, these businesses will be removed, and the offerings for our members will be reduced. WCA members would probably fill that demand at Westbard and in downtown Bethesda, but we would still miss having the stores closer to us. Also, DC would lose that tax revenue.

WCA members also used the grocery store that was there and miss the convenience of it. The Mom's Organic option appears to be a partial answer but not the full service, one stop grocery store we were led to expect. Even if the residential growth in the area can support another specialty grocer, DC will fall short of meeting a fundamental principle of urban development

which allows residents a high quality of life by being able to live, work, go to school and shop in one's neighborhood. Where will these new residents get their one stop shop groceries? The closest full grocery to them is now and would continue to be the Westbard Giant, so they will need their cars to get there, putting additional pressure on parking and traffic near the development area, and Maryland will receive that grocery tax revenue. Please exercise your vision of what new urban developments should include.

The prosperity of DC and Montgomery County is interrelated in many respects. If DC doesn't provide housing for residents to own, it increases the demand for it in Montgomery County, increasing pressure for development. Please consider carefully what this project wants to do: cause new residents to pay rent at high rates, robbing DC residents of the right to build equity in the very communities in which they love to live. If residents can build equity, they will be less likely to become dependent upon city services, in DC or Montgomery County. This is not a developer's concern, but usage of city services is certainly relevant to DC authorizers, as well as DC and Montgomery County taxpayers. Please don't be persuaded by short term revenue contributions to overlook the long-term benefits to DC's budget of helping residents to realize their dream of home ownership.

WCA members contribute to DC's tax base by spending in DC. Only you can decide if our opinion is important to you. But we have a fellowship with our DC neighbors, and we hope that they will not face what WCA now faces in the planned Westbard development. We have a revolution of sorts in Montgomery County, but it's not against development. A developer's job is to develop. But only the Planning Department can set the vision for the area. May your vision be closer to the community's dream of growth, prosperity and opportunity because it will also serve DC better over time than what the current developer plan is offering.

Thank you for allowing me to testify on behalf of the WCA and for all you do for the District of Columbia.