

RE: Case 19-10, Valor Development LLC Proposal

Written Testimony of Ellen Bass in Support of LadyBird Mixed-use Project

October 1, 2019

Chairman Hood and Zoning Commission Members:

I write this testimony in support of the proposed mixed-use project presented in this Planned Unit Development (PUD) application. I previously submitted very similar testimony in support of a design review application concerning the same property. As a 36-year DC resident of Ward 3, I am keenly interested in improving the vitality, walkability and availability of amenities in the neighborhoods here. This project advances these goals.

This project offers a new grocery store, one that is not now available to northwest DC residents, along with new residential development to support it and provide critically needed housing in Ward 3. The grocery store and other small retail proposed will make the neighborhood more walkable and inviting. The buildings in question are a more-than-reasonable size for the space and location (indeed, the project has been downsized substantially during the review process, unfortunately in my view). This development replaces a grocery store that existed until it was closed several years ago, leaving a dead and unsightly property; therefore, the retail component of the proposal before you is not a significant change. As for the residential component, my understanding is that it is not far larger (if larger at all) from what could be built as a matter-of-right. This project taken as a whole including a small public space and retail is superior to a matter-of-right, residential-only development.

I welcome more residential development like this, because of the great need for more housing in DC and to support local businesses and other amenities of which we need more. With over 200 apartments and a significant number of larger units, the project will accommodate many people who want to move from single-family homes or do not want to or cannot afford to live in one. To the extent that those people come from outside DC especially, having new residents here will grow the tax base and fight commuter traffic congestion with the attendant environmental degradation it brings. There is close-by bus service and a shuttle service to the Tenleytown metro. We should encourage use of such transportation options, and this development does so.

It is important to consider this project in the context of the city-wide concern about affordable housing and displacement. This development will provide about 26 apartments at below-market rates under the Inclusionary Zoning regulations (11 percent of the building square footage). While this is not, of course, a complete answer to the affordable housing issue (no private development will be), it is a piece of the solution.

This is especially true in super-expensive Ward 3. At the same time, this development does not displace anyone.

The Commission should also give credit for the extraordinary amount of public engagement the developer undertook to get to this point. The project was discussed at length at two ANC's over several years. It was changed significantly in response to community input. For instance, an opposition group strongly opposed the larger grocery store in the original design, and the current project proposes a smaller one. The residential component was made smaller too. While these changes might not be my personal preference, it is important to recognize that the opposition's position was already accommodated.

I urge the Zoning Commission to rule favorably on this PUD application.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Ellen Bass".

Ellen Bass
3600 Cumberland St., N.W.