



Woodridge Civic Association

P.O. Box 80151
Washington, DC 20018

September 21, 2025

**Letter of Opposition, Woodridge Civic Association
on ZC Case 24-11,
Jemal's Schaeffer LLC & Jemal's Bumper George LLC**

**To: District of Columbia Office of Zoning
Government of the District of Columbia
Washington, DC**

**Re: ZC Case 24-11, Jemal's Schaeffer LLC & Jemal's Bumper George LLC,
Consolidated PUD and Related Map Amendment**

To those present and hearing the afore mentioned application,

Thank you for the opportunity to present this letter, as testimony, on behalf of our community members and neighbors in the matter ZC 24-11, Jemal's Schaeffer LLC & Jemal's Bumper George LLC. Therein, the applicant seeks to alter the existing zoning designation MU-5B to PDR-1.

As background underlying our dissent, the applicant, along with those involved prior property owners, and associated partners, created a proposal to redevelop a parcel of land into a new community called "New City DC." As proposed, its occurrence set to rise in an area bounded by Bladensburg Road NE, Montana Avenue NE, and New York Avenue NE. The proposal, then deemed appropriate and in compliance with the adopted Comprehensive Plan¹ and Future Land Use Map, tacitly created a contract between the public, government, and developer (Douglas Development), to redevelop a 16-acre site of 1.5 million square feet of mixed use including retail, hospitality, and residential housing branded as early as 2015 as "New City DC".

The public supported what they anticipated becoming a thriving destination full of new opportunities, fully relieved of past tethered to industrial use. We reveled in lofty thoughts of having more elevated livable spaces along with accompanying amenities. Collectively, we anticipated realizing places being transit adjacent, being genuinely affordable, and more welcoming while complementing existing neighborhoods nearby. It was to be a long-sought break, a tangible relief, from an inhospitable past made over many decades.

In the letter attached from Dr. Arianna Gard, University of Maryland, Assistant Professor, Department of Psychology, Neuroscience and Cognitive Neuroscience Program, University

¹ D.C. Comprehensive Plan: a high-level planning guide legally requiring, "that all development, zoning changes, and other planning decisions must align with the goals and policies outlined in the city's Comprehensive Plan, including its Future Land Use Map (FLUM)"

of Maryland, College Park, the development would overcome the well document ill challenges she reports² facing the area of applicants focus.

Dismally, the property lay languishing for decades failing to produce on the opportunity proffered. All the while, the existing zoning and future land use plans supported this non-industrial centric development effort.

Notably, the adopted Comprehensive Plan of August 2021, including the Future Land Use Map (FLUM), prescribed providing a long-term vision for how the District of Columbia develops, and exercises its authority toward building a better community for all. After its protracted development, the area of the subject application under consideration received designation as MU-5B. Thus, the property developer continued making great pronouncements of what was coming in concert with and complementing the city land use plan for the area. Again, the property languished, benefiting from WMATA's short-term multi-use need for a proximity bus storage location complementing its garage redevelopment project.

The recent pandemic may have altered some market opportunities. Thus, we acknowledge ongoing challenges in the post pandemic environment. Nevertheless, the messaging from the developer continued raising hopes of the pending revitalization from the existing blighted light industrial use. All the while, the existing zoning designation engendered the community supporting the offering of relief from the blighted landscape at a prominent gateway to the city. The messaging remained unaltered. The developer announced revised phasing but offered reassurances of a steady march toward a realization. The proposed opportunities for equity; the bringing much needed affordable housing; and mitigating the tide of displacement of the economically disadvantaged or the unhoused appeared within reach.

Clearly the early plans once supported and lauded by ANC 5C commissioners, and championed by the mayor, as positive developments for a realizing a thriving new community addition, sorely failed. This was not a failure of the zoning, nor the Comprehensive Plan. Further, more disappointingly, the failure occurred while not contributing to the 2025 plan for affordable housing particularly in this section of Ward 5. Now the potential is ever more doubtful in the 2050 longer range plan if this application receives the rezoning requested and for its accompanying proposed alteration of use.

This occurs to the chagrin of those who struggled for decades to cause shedding the locations, and nearby locations, of industrial use diligently planning toward building a greater livable community asset complementary to that found in neighboring Ivy City along the New York Avenue Corridor. The existing zoning offered providing more than motor hotels, fast food and fueling stations, set about the area becoming more of a living destination, rather than a waypoint into and out of Washington.

Now the proposal accompanying the rezoning reduces use to producing a 185,000 square foot "warehouse." Attached to the rezoning is a nefarious offer of future development on the remaining site at some point, but nothing set in stone. We might suggest that this is just

² Attached, AirPollutionEffectsonHealth_NYAve+Bladensburg_fromUMD.docx, Dr. Arianna Gard, University of Maryland, 2025-09

another opportunity to get burned using public dollars supporting a private interest at a great cost to the public interest and intent for the area.

More concerning is that the D.C. Government via DCHD, is seeking federal assistance through a 2020 Section 108 application to supplement private financing for economic development. The application proposed 1.59 million square feet of mixed-use development, creation of a new grocery option, jobs, retail, infrastructure, and affordable housing.

The former project consists of nine buildings including a new 150,300 GSF destination grocery store serving a neighborhood with limited grocery options, a new 210-room hotel, a new 45,600 GSF office building, 149,740 GSF of retail, and 859 housing units, with 20% of the housing units designated as affordable units for low 2 and very low-income 3 households. This will enable more Washingtonians to afford to live in the city where they work.

This \$460 million economic development project will create 573 new permanent jobs and 2,726 construction jobs. New City DC will be an attractive workplace for beltway businesses looking to participate in the urban feel that their employees desire.

But the applicant's proposal slams into the face of the Comprehensive Plan and is contrary to while inconsistent with its stated goals. Clearly this new proposal of Warehouse/Office dependent upon the rezoning, cannot rival the earlier New City DC project. It will certainly result in adversities of consequence as noted in the work of Dr. Gard we reference in this matter. Further, we suggest that changes in property ownership do not undo the tenants of the Comprehensive Plan. They come benefiting all and not to purposely advantage a sole property owner or developer, with dubious future opportunities.

Further, We, the Woodridge Civic Association, holds that the application and "proposal" represents a substantial breach of the public trust, undermining the basic tenants of Future Land Use Maps, whereas it stands seeking to prioritize private interests over the public needs and desires, being obstinately contrary to the interests of the District of Columbia.

We are mindful that Douglas Development offloaded the property at the end of 2024, along with two others in Ivy City. There, it enriched itself by \$96 million, being unable to successfully acquire the triangular site in its entirety, or simply losing interest, in response to market changes. Whatever its reasoning, in the absence of communications otherwise, the neighboring communities continued in a delusion of hoping seeing the realization of the "New City DC" having endured lengthy delays having received assurances the project would proceed as late as 2023.

We acknowledge that a portion of the property is currently under lease to the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority as a bus storage lot while it modernizes its bus facility at 2600 Bladensburg Road. There is expectation that the project will conclude in the Spring of 2027, releasing the full extent for development. This was a tolerable use of the property, having received assurances that a portion of the property at Montana Avenue and New York Avenues was ready for construction in the fall of 2024. Although substantial amounts of soil moved around the site, little confirmed advancement toward the rising of New City

DC. The land remodeling activity was little more than a delusion of progress meeting a permitting/zoning requirement for activity without having restarted the entire process.

The applicant's current proposal cannot occur without the redesignation of the land to PDR-1. Therein, the proposed use would be a visually unappealing monolithic warehouse structure, fronting New York Avenue. This use, about the size of a data center complex see elsewhere in the region, offering no amenities to the neighboring communities, but offering vehicular parking for two hundred. At the same time, it would rise making future development of sites less attractive for future residential/retail use having no buffer complementing livability or walkability. This proposal is comparative to the FedEx development at the intersection of Eckington Place, Florida Avenue, and New York Avenues. We are mindful that there, New York Avenue buffers the industrial use of FedEx. Further, New York Avenue visually shields direct observation. Additionally, the Pepco Substation, and Alethia Tanner Park provide sufficient separation from a heavy commuter arterial, and the Eckington Subdivision. Gateway, Arboretum, and Woodridge South only benefit from distance, but have few shields from increased environmental adversities the current proposal offers,

Citing the ZC case summary, we find untenable the proposed Consolidated PUD & Related Map Amendment from MU-5B to PDR-1, New York & Montana Aves. NE (Sq. 4268, Lots 6, 12, 14, 801, 804 & 819; and Parcels 153/113, 153/152 & 153/153) - Ward 5. Exhibit G of the case file. We, as a community, have been down this road before, experiencing ongoing unrealized deceptive and misleading promises. The applicants selling arguments are little more than self-aggrandizing, impotent, and adverse to flourishing sustainable community building.

While the applicants Exhibit G speaks to the contrary, lauding the proposal as immensely of public benefit, to the contrary, we (WCA) adamantly regard the proposal as.

- a) "Inconsistent" with the 2021 adopted Comprehensive Plan ("Comp Plan") and with its other adopted public policies and active programs related to the subject site; We (WCA) this conversion in zoning as the PDR-1 proposal offers no retail, nor livable spaces or amenities complementary to building the positive growth of a healthy community and populace. Further, it cements a damnable perpetual, and an unattractive lock on and linking to the industrial use past the community desperately seeks to shed.
- b) We (WCA) hold that it does result in unacceptable project impacts on the surrounding area (camouflaged blight) or on the operation of city services and facilities. We hold that the commission should find the proposed conversion to be either unfavorable, incapable of mitigation, or unacceptable given lack of quality of public benefits in the project; and
- c) Lastly, WCA deems the change as benefiting a single entity, and not the professed public interests codified in the Comprehensive plan, lacking specific public benefits and project amenities of the proposed development thus being inconsistent with the Comp Plan or and other adopted public policies and active programs related to the subject site."
- d) Further, Public Transit access remains problematic, where the applicant exhibits no contribution to improvement but drawing upon it for its own enrichment. Consequently, it is unclear whether the congestion of New York Avenue, Montana Avenue, and Bladensburg will improve. However, we note

that dDOT³ is preparing corridor improvements along Bladensburg Road and New York Avenue complementary and as a consequence (existing zoning designation and Future Land Use Planning) as a response to existing conditions which do not account to the potential adversities this project offers as it is not non-vehicular dependent.

Regardless of statutory assignment of import, we (WCA) assert that community input through civic associations, community groups, and residents, are necessary and essential offering a greater opportunity for expression in the matter before us. Thus, we are here to accomplish this to accurately enliven the matters of record.

We, going beyond concerns of adverse changes in existing market opportunities, cannot envision any racially or age equitable outcomes. We hold the project creates few, if any, favorable opportunities, and more undesirable outcomes by developing a portion of the New York Avenue, NE corridor with an industrial building, having a face of 832-ft fronting New York Avenue. Further, the proposal, dependent upon a re-zoning, will include limited uses that create limited and few employment opportunities and without providing any essential retail or service establishments outwardly facing the community, serving few beyond the interests of the applicant. In addition, we reiterate that the plan calls for provisioning two hundred parking spaces.

We, the Woodridge Civic Association, sternly recommend against any approval of the project and proposed rezoning providing convenience in the applicant's interest. The proposal before the Zoning Commission will substantially increase the probability of adversely affecting the future of the subject area, engendering the area as substandard, and not worthy of ambitious visionary development enlivening the community.

We appreciate this opportunity to express our concerns about bringing urban improvements to our community which are complementary rather than adversarial. We ask that they receive the maximum allowable consideration when rendering a disposition of this case.

Respectfully submitted,

Jeremiah Montague, Jr.
President, Woodridge Civic Association
jmontaguejr@gmail.com or a93jeep1@gmail.com
WoodridgeCivicAssociation@gmail.com

³ The District of Columbia Department of Transportation (dDOT)



September 24, 2025

To Whom It May Concern,

My name is Dr. Arianna Gard, and I am an Assistant Professor at the University of Maryland, College Park. I am a trained Developmental Psychologist and Neuroscientist with expertise in lifespan development, childhood brain development, and neighborhood factors and socioeconomic resources that support health and wellbeing. I was asked to summarize the scientific literature linking air pollution (including traffic-related pollutant exposure) to health by Mr. Jeremiah Montague, Jr., resident and community leader in Ward 5 of Washington DC. To the best of my ability, I do so with impartiality and in the service of ensuring community members and public officials have access to high quality research evidence. Please do not hesitate to reach out to me with further questions or concerns.

What are the effects of air pollution on human health and wellbeing?

All discussions of land use must consider the health impacts of environmental pollutant exposures. The intersection at Bladensburg Road NE and New York Ave NE is a high traffic area; the city was recently assigned a grade of 'F' for air quality (American Lung Association, 2025, "State of the Air" report). Air pollution is a combination of inorganic materials including particulate matter (PM) (e.g., organic and elemental carbon [EC], metals and polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons [PAHs]), carbon monoxide (CO), ozone (O₃), lead, nitrogen dioxide (NO₂), and sulfur dioxide (SO₂) (<https://www.epa.gov/criteria-air-pollutants>). Traffic-related air pollution also contains small particles of metal such as lead, copper, aluminum, and manganese (Pujol et al., 2016). A large body of research raises concerns regarding the potentially harmful effects of inhaled pollutants on the central nervous system. Traffic-related air pollution specifically has been associated with lower IQ and worse academic outcomes, and behavioral challenges in children characteristic of Attention-Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder and Autism Spectrum Disorder (Chang et al., 2019; Suades et al., 2015; Flores-Pajot et al., 2016). In older adults, TRAP exposure is linked to faster cognitive decline and dementia (Clifford et al., 2016; Chen et al., 2017). This scientific evidence comes from large meta-analyses and reviews of dozens of investigations; this type of replication across study designs, populations, and geography is central to expert conclusions of the negative health effects of air pollutants.

The effects of air pollutants on observable health and cognitive outcomes operate through inflammation and oxidative stress in the respiratory and central nervous systems. Air pollutants lead to decreased volume and disorganization of neurons in the brain through such inflammatory processes (Pujol et al., 2016; Power et al., 2016; Prado Bert, 2018). For example, small particles emitted by diesel exhaust selectively impact dopaminergic neurons (Block et al., 2004) located in areas of brain responsible

for executive function, reward, and emotion. Again, this evidence sources from dozens of scientific investigations rather than single research studies. Children are especially vulnerable to the negative effects of environmental pollutants due to ongoing brain development that persists through early adulthood. A review of all neuroimaging studies conducted in children and older adults revealed robust effects of pollutant exposure on several developmental processes within the central nervous system (Prado Bert et al., 2018).

Relevance to human populations at New York Ave NE and Bladensburg Road NE, Washington, DC, USA:

The intersection of New York Ave NE and Bladensburg Road NE is situated within Census Tract 111 in Washington DC. Approximately 4,985 residents live within the bounds of this Census tract. Importantly, this area is densely populated by children under 18 years of age ($n = 1,071$; 21.5%) and adults 65 years of age and older ($n = 828$; 16.6%) – and to a greater extent than the rest of the District (district-wide under 18 years = 12.7% or $n = 85,501$). Thus, the potential negative effects of increased air pollution will preferentially impact some of the District's most vulnerable populations.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Arianna M. Gard'.

Arianna M. Gard, PhD
Assistant Professor, Department of Psychology
Neuroscience and Cognitive Neuroscience Program
University of Maryland, College Park
<https://www.gardlab.umd.edu>
arigard@umd.edu