

Letter in Support of ZC Case No. 24-15, 901 Monroe Street, LLC

My name is Nick Cheolas, and I am a current Edgewood resident (six blocks from 901 Monroe) and former ANC Commissioner.¹ During my term as ANC, I was involved with several BZA and ZC matters, including ZC Case No. 15-02 (Portrait Square townhomes near 7th and Jackson NE), ZC Case No. 18-21 (Hanover 8th St, at 8th and Jackson St NE) and BZA Case No. 19377 (St. Paul Townhomes, near 4th St NE). I **support** the proposed development at 901 Monroe St. NE.

Twelve years of an empty, fenced-off lot is enough. Twelve years of an empty, fenced-off lot between two dynamic communities and across from a metro station is a tragedy. Whatever the reasons, the delays in this project have come at the expense of homes for neighbors and customers for local businesses. This empty lot has been an albatross for the Brookland and Edgewood communities for more than a decade.

This empty lot was also a key obstacle in the long struggle to bring a grocery store to 701 Monroe St NE. In 2009, coincidentally, 701 Monroe was opposed by many as "too much," a threat to "neighborhood character," and "such a large project" with "density and height never seen before in the Brookland area" that "must not be approved."² Last month, though, the community celebrated the grand opening of Trader Joe's in that same building.

This commission has heard and will hear many opinions and views on this project. I respect those—even those with which I disagree—and I respect each and every neighbor providing each opinion. Amid those opinions, I ask that the Commission keep three things in mind.

First, this project will provide homes for people—new neighbors in our community. This is, fundamentally, a good thing. The practical effect of addressing concerns about "massing," "density," or "height" is fewer homes, and fewer neighbors.

Second, this project will provide customers for local businesses. The project site sits directly between two valued businesses that Brookland and Edgewood have lost in recent months—Brookland Pint and Brookland's Finest.³ Many others are struggling.

Finally, this project will fill a palpable, embarrassing, and logically infuriating gap⁴ between the Monroe St NE, 8th St NE, and 12th St NE corridors. I can understand concerns about density, massing, green space, traffic, and parking—there's nothing malicious or irrational about people

¹ ANC 5E01 (currently ANC 5F02) in northeast Edgewood, from 2019 to 2021.

² See Exhibit 70, ZC Case Nos. 08-24 and 08-24A/04-25, "Testimony concerning Zoning Commission Cases No's- 08-24 and 08-24A/04-25," ANC 5A06, Oct. 5, 2009.

³ Brookland's Finest was also vehemently opposed by many in the community who were concerned about "trash, noise, traffic congestion, vermin, neighborhood parking, and other nuisances," "children in the neighborhood having to witness public intoxication," and worried that the restaurant would "change the culture of the neighborhood," "interfere with residents' ability to walk and play outside" and "bring crime into the neighborhood." None of this happened, and when Brookland's Finest closed twelve years later, residents wept.

⁴ The narrow sidewalk on the south side of Monroe St NE, between 9th and 10th St NE, is a daily inconvenience for residents.

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who like their neighborhood the way it is. But there are few places *more* appropriate for dense housing than directly across from a metro station, amidst struggling businesses. And while there's no reason to believe the concerns expressed in the letters are not genuine,⁵ it is unclear what *practical* modifications would satisfy or address many of the (often conflicting) concerns and suggestions.⁶ While these concerns may be deeply felt, so too is the impact of this empty lot on the Brookland and Edgewood communities.

Amidst the hundreds of opinions in the record, I close with one: We should build communities that people want to live in—and places for those people to live.

Respectfully,



Nick Cheolas
Edgewood Resident

⁵ This may not apply to letters from residents who opposed and successfully fought the 2011 plans only to retroactively praise those plans as “better looking and a better fit” for the community. *See, e.g.*, Ex. 180.

⁶ *See, e.g.*, Ex. 31, outlining 40+ concerns and suggestions related to the project.