

Testimony by Dr. Charles G. Field, President of the Woodley
Park Historical Society

Before the D.C. Zoning Commission
January 25, 1988

Mr. Chairman and members of the Zoning Commission. I am Charles G. Field, President of the Woodley Park Historical Society. I hold graduate degrees in law and urban planning and am a resident of the Woodley Park neighborhood. I am a petitioner in the actions concerning the overlay proposals for squares 2202, 2203 and 2204. My comments on the action before the Commission are contained in part in this testimony and in part in my concurrence with the testimony presented by representatives of the the Woodley Park Community Association. I am joined by Dr. Cynthia R. Field, an architectural historian holding her doctorate in architectural history from Columbia University. She is founder of the National Building Museum and ~~is~~ Director of the Smithsonian's Office of Architectural History and Historic Preservation. Mr. Lawrence Auerbach, a co-founder of the Society, serves with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. He has served as Chairman of the Section on Urban, State, and Local Government Law of the American Bar Association and is presently treasurer of the Historical Society.

We would like to emphasize the unique historic neighborhood qualities of Woodley Park and demonstrate the integral relationship to the areas under consideration by the Commission. In particular:

1. Woodley Park has been a coherent neighborhood from its inception, integrating both commercial and residential attributes.
2. Buildings within the the commercial areas reflect their residential origins and their service ties to adjacent residential areas.
3. The architectural integrity of the neighborhood is intimately tied to the thematic relationship between the residential and commercial areas.
4. There is a federal interest in maintaining the present architectural qualities of the commercial areas at interest.

We hope that the Commission will keep these historical and architectural qualities in mind as you reach decisions. These decisions should support the townhouse scale of the neighborhood and the harmony in mass and architectural style between buildings within the overlay zone and the rest of Woodley Park.

ZONING COMMISSION

CASE No. 86-26

EXHIBIT No. 266

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First, let me tell you who we are. The Woodley Park Historical Society was created by the Woodley Park Community Association in 1986 to conduct research on the architectural and social history of Woodley Park. We have been lead by our findings to investigate the possibility and desirability of designating the Woodley Park area as a historic district under the laws of the District of Columbia and federal government. We are now in the midst of conducting the architectural surveys and historical analyses with the financial support of the community, the District of Columbia Office of Historic Preservation, the National Trust for Historic Preservation and the Advisory Neighborhood Commission - 3C. We regularly hold community wide meetings to discuss our growing sense of the historical identify of Woodley Park.

The commercial areas under consideration are part of historic Woodley Park. Prior to 1900 Woodley Park was the rural fringe of Washington. Washington residents built their summer homes in such locations as Cleveland Park, skipping over our present day neighborhood. Washingtonians traveled through our rural area using the Woodley High Bridge which crossed Rock Creek and continued as Woodley Road up the hill over what is now the drive into Rock Creek Park from Calvert Street, along 24th Street, along a short stretch of what is now Connecticut Ave, turning left along Woodley Road (in front of todays Sheraton Washington), to 29th Street, up to Cathedral Ave. past the Maret School to Woodley Road and along Woodley to what was then Goergetown and Rockville Turnpike, now Wisconsin Ave.

This original Woodley Road forms the Western part of the historic area. The southern boundary begins at the Taft Bridge and Rock Creek Park. On the east is the park and the zoo. The northern boundary is the Klinge Street Bridge and extends over to the point where Woodley Road and Klinge meet.

Woodley Park, as a neighborhood, came into existence just after the turn of the century although it was identified on maps as early as the mid 19th Century. Its original and continuing purposes have been to serve as a moderate density in-town residential area for families of all ages and professional interests. The tracts of land, including the section along Connecticut Ave, were owned by a few landholders at the turn of the century. Once Connecticut Ave was straightened out and the Taft bridge planned, these owners platted and built distinctive attached townhouse homes both along Connecticut Ave (SLIDES 1 AND 2) and the adjacent side streets. Most construction occurred during the 1909 to 1930 period. (SLIDES 3 AND 4) Most buildings along Connecticut Ave in blocks 2203 and 2004 were 3 stories in height, some went to four stories. Townhouses elsewhere in 2204 and other blocks within Woodley Park were 2 to 3 stories in height.

These homes including those along Connecticut served as primary residences for families whose wage earners worked

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downtown. The original family in my home in square 2204 (I live on Woodley Place) was a journalist. Woodley Park was one of Washington's original in-town neighborhoods. (SLIDE 5) Today it retains this quality of urbane living as seen in these pictures of neighborhood homes. (SLIDES 6,7 AND 8)

Woodley Park has always been characterized by moderate density townhouse construction as primary residences for Washingtonians ~~who~~ working downtown.

As you can see from the slides there has been a harmony in architecture and mass of buildings between structures built in squares 2002, 2203, and 2204. There is a distinctive flow in the urban fabric between Connecticut Ave buildings and those in adjacent blocks. This distinctive unity, unlike those patterns that exist along Wisconsin and parts of Connecticut around Van Ness, has been one of the hallmarks of Woodley Park. Unlike Cleveland Park where the excitement is of diversity in architectural style; Woodley Park's excitement is its harmonious texture of mass, style and materials.

The neighborhood was intended only to be residential with commercial activities springing up at later dates. Often the commercial re-uses took place within the original buildings as within 2204. In some cases (SLIDES 9 AND 10) the fronts were redone with facades and signs. As you can see from the slide, the original design of the building still survives. Where rebuilding occurred - e.g. the one story construction of the People's drug store and Washington and Lee Savings and Loan in square 2203 - the new buildings did not disturb the mass and scale of the original neighborhood. Unfortunately, some of these newer buildings did not preserve the architectural style of the neighborhood, a loss to the neighborhood. Fortunately, enough original structures remain. With sensitive treatment, their texture and meaning will shine forth.

The commercial uses in the buildings have retained their neighborhood focus. They include services such as dry cleaning and laundry, pharmacy and drug store, flower shop, liquor and small scale grocery. Today the neighborhood population may also be seen to include the transient population from the two major hotels in the area who are served by numerous moderate priced restaurants.

There is a precious architectural harmony to the neighborhood. To discuss this I would like to turn to my wife and sub-committee chair, Dr. Cynthia Field. She will be followed by Mr. Auerbach.

Testimony by
Dr. Cynthia R. Field

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Woodley Park flowered in a period of enthusiasm for things British, a period of taste for the British invention of a subdued, polite classicism marked by delicacy of scale and restraint.

SLIDE
SLIDE
SLIDE
SLIDE
SLIDE

Brick construction with decorative detail around doors, and windows, and inset panels mark our distinctive architecture as based in early 19th Century neoclassicism. Two houses often read as one.

SLIDE
SLIDE
SLIDE
SLIDE

The commercial buildings share these characteristics. Even in fill buildings of the late 1920's and 30's observed the rule of classical taste and modest scale already set for the neighborhood.

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SLIDE

The unity of the composition has been more important than the individual house.

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This unique architectural character marks not only a special time in local architectural history, but also a special place -
Woodley Park.

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