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February 1, 1988

Mr. Lindsley Williams
Chairman
Zoning Commission of the
District of Columbia
The District Building
1350 Pennsylvania Ave., N.W.
Room 11
Washington, D.C. 20004

Dear Chairman Williams:

On January 25, 1988, I presented the testimony of the D.C. Preservation League concerning Case 86-26 (Cleveland Park) before the Zoning Commission. To complete the Commission's records on this case, I am pleased to submit that testimony in written form (enclosed).

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this important matter.

Sincerely,



Michael C. Quinn
Executive Director

cc: Cleveland Park Historical Society

Michael C. Quinn

Executive Director

Lori M. Ward

Assistant Director

ZONING COMMISSION
District of Columbia

Case 86-26

Exhibit 385

ZONING COMMISSION

District of Columbia

CASE NO. 86-26

EXHIBIT NO. 385

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D.C. Preservation League
Testimony before the Zoning Commission of
the District of Columbia
Case 86-26, Connecticut Avenue Corridor
January 25, 1988

Chairman and members of the Board, my name is Michael C. Quinn and I appear before you today on behalf of the D.C. Preservation League where I serve as Executive Director. I am a professional in architectural history and historic preservation planning.

The League is a nonprofit corporation, formed under the laws of the District of Columbia to protect historic buildings, structures and districts in Washington. We've been working to achieve these purposes for sixteen years, and membership in the League, which is open to the public, now numbers about 1500. Our members live and work throughout the District of Columbia and are concerned with historic buildings citywide and actions that affect them.

I am here to testify in support of the overlay zone proposed by the Office of Planning for Connecticut Avenue between Porter and Macomb Streets. As you know, this section of Connecticut Avenue is within the Cleveland Park Historic District, and is an integral part of the District.

I am here to offer our perspective, from working citywide to promote preservation, on the zoning proposal. Our experience convinces us that the proposed rezoning is essential to help preserve the Cleveland Park Historic District. As you know, upon designation as an historic district, an area receives certain protections under D.C. Law 2-144. These protections are intended to enhance those important architectural and historical features of the district that led to its designation. The problem is that in the face of conflicting zoning, the protective provisions of 2-144 aren't always sufficient even though it is hailed nationwide as one of the strongest preservation laws.

We find that where historic district designation and zoning are at odds, which is the case on this section of Connecticut Avenue, two things happen: 1) there will be battles, and 2) historic designation may not achieve the preservation for which it was enacted.

To illustrate this, it is easy to see that a property owner on this section of Connecticut Avenue now has two conflicting signals from the District government: on the one hand, the zoning clearly creates a development potential; on the other, the historic district designation is intended to preserve the characteristics of the existing buildings. If that owner plans development to full zoning, as he might legitimately expect, he is very likely to be opposed by those interested in preservation. A costly, time-consuming, divisive battle can result. In fact, each development is then mired down in confusion, conflict, and delay, as the competing interests battle over which of the city's policies are supposed to take precedence. And our experience is that the preservation law is not always sufficient to achieve preservation when such a conflict exists with zoning. Demolition and inappropriate new construction can still occur.

In its policies the District government recognizes the shortcomings of contradictory land use designations. The Comprehensive Plan calls for consistency to ensure that different agencies of the District government--each with a different authority--act in concert to achieve one goal. Certainly, it is a healthier environment for landowners and residents of a neighborhood to know clearly the official policies for their property and community.

The League wants to emphasize that in the case before you, this is not merely a matter of good policy. Cleveland Park is a very special neighborhood, rich in history and architecture that make it an extraordinary part of Washington's heritage. Connecticut Avenue is an integral part of the District. I will not repeat the descriptions of its significant features that have been offered by others, but I will emphasize the importance of preserving the existing historic fabric of Cleveland Park Historic District as an important neighborhood within Washington. The Comprehensive Plan also recognizes the importance of preserving the low density, local neighborhood center characteristics of this portion of Connecticut Avenue.

In conclusion, the League urges you to enact the proposed zoning overlay for Connecticut Avenue between MaComb and Porter Streets; zoning that is more consistent with the historic district designation and that unequivocally will enhance and preserve the characteristics that led to its designation.

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you.