



CLEVELAND PARK HISTORICAL SOCIETY 3101 HIGHLAND PLACE, N.W. CLEVELAND PARK, D.C. 20008 (202) 244-1276

ZONING COMMISSION CASE NO. 86-26 - CLEVELAND PARK OVERLAY ZONE

HEARING: JULY 7, 1988

***** COPIES OF SLIDES SHOWN AT THE HEARING *****

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ZONING SECRETARIAT,
DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

Testimony prepared by Kathleen Sinclair Wood
Executive Director, Cleveland Park Historical Society

My testimony this evening will cover 3 areas.

1. Connecticut Avenue reflects a very early innovative approach to zoning and urban planning. Rather than being zoned strip commercial as initially planned and as was common in other cities, in 1920 Connecticut Avenue was zoned for apartment buildings interspersed with local neighborhood shopping precincts.
2. Connecticut Avenue has been designated a "Special Street" in the Comprehensive Plan thereby making its conservation and preservation a specific policy of the D.C. and Federal Governments.
3. Connecticut Avenue is an integral part of the Cleveland Park Historic District. It is a valuable historic, architectural, cultural and educational resource. Under D.C. Law 2-144 the preservation of its historic character and the historic fabric of the buildings is called for. The historic structures can be added to but must not be destroyed.

To further protect the historic distinction between the residential side streets and the commercial avenues it is important to ALTER THE ZONING OF THE THREE TOWNHOUSES ON ORDWAY STREET (lots 72, 73, 74 in Square 2068) TO RESIDENTIAL (R-2).

To stabilize this historic area and serve as a disincentive to replacing historic structures with larger modern office buildings it is important to REDUCE THE MATTER-OF-RIGHT F.A.R. FROM 2.5 TO 2.0 AND LIMIT P.U.D. GUIDELINES FOR HEIGHT AND F.A.R. TO THE SAME LIMITS AS THE OVERLAY MATTER-OF RIGHT (40 FEET AND 2.0 F.A.R. (1.0 NON-RESIDENTIAL)).

ZONING COMMISSION

CASE No. 86-26

EXHIBIT No. 550

ZONING COMMISSION
District of Columbia
CASE NO. 86-26
EXHIBIT NO. 550A1

4/21/20



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1. INNOVATIVE ZONING/LAND USE PLANNING

Washington enacted one of the earliest zoning ordinances in the country in 1920. In their treatment of Connecticut Avenue a novel approach was taken. Rather than zoning the whole avenue commercial, which was the common approach, the avenue was zoned for apartment houses. Interspersed among the apartment houses and adjoining the single family residential neighborhoods, small scale shopping areas were planned. This novel idea led to a mix of residential and commercial which is still successful today. These small shopping precincts became the main streets or village centers for the surrounding residential communities.

For additional historical information I refer you to the submission I made for the January hearings of this case. I would like to emphasize that subsequent planners such as J.C. Nichols and Harold M. Lewis stressed the importance of planning one or two-story shopping areas to serve the residential neighborhoods and avoid strip commercial developments. The Connecticut Avenue experiment was a success and created an example for other parts of the city. In his 1956 report Harold M. Lewis wrote: "the removal of strip commercial districts from the zoning map along a number of arterial streets in the outer reaches of the District must be cited for praise, although there are obviously other strips just as useless and noxious still remaining." (Harold M. Lewis; A New Zoning Plan for the District of Columbia; p. 7) Lewis goes on the say: "In general, there does not seem to be any need for more than one-story commercial structures in small neighborhood shopping districts nor more than two stories (offices over shops) in outlying community business centers. In both these types of districts, a height limit of three stories should provide for other permitted uses and still keep the districts compatible in scale with the surrounding residential areas." (Lewis, p. 43)

We can still see today how this pioneering approach for Connecticut Avenue shaped the whole avenue from the Taft bridge to Chevy Chase Circle over the decades. With the exception of the high density development at Van Ness, Connecticut Avenue has retained its character as a broad avenue lined with gracious apartment buildings representing a variety of popular architectural styles and interspersed with convenient low scale shopping areas maintaining their historic architectural features from the 1920s and 30s. The low scale and the predominance of uses serving households rather than offices creates a friendly informal streetscape conducive to use by the residents who walk along the street greeting friends and neighbors while shopping for their essential needs. This is true in Woodley Park, Cleveland Park, at Nebraska Avenue and in Chevy Chase.

In Cleveland Park this shopping area is well used by the residents of single family homes, apartment houses, townhouses, and condos as well as by residents of other neighborhoods which lack these handy local services. The novel planning approach supported by the zoning ordinance enacted in 1920 has proved enormously successful. Notice in these slides the number of people who do their shopping on foot without an automobile. Notice the number of elderly who live in the neighborhood and still are able to meet friends for lunch at the Roma and pick up their essential items at the newly refurbished Peoples' Drug Store.

THIS IS A USER-FRIENDLY SHOPPING AREA - A VILLAGE CENTER!!

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2. CONNECTICUT AVENUE A "SPECIAL STREET" - COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

The entire length of Connecticut Avenue leading from Chevy Chase Circle to the White House is a designated special street in the Comprehensive Plan. Its conservation and preservation are mandated by DC Law 5-187 effective March 16, 1985.

Special Streets and Places are a concept that dates to Pierre L'Enfant's grand vision for the new federal city; a concept that has been recognized and reinforced by subsequent city planners to the present time. Connecticut Avenue meets all four criteria for designation as a special street. (For a detailed analysis of this I refer you to the second section of my previous submission for the January hearings.)

Connecticut Avenue is remarkably intact with most of its historic features still in place. It provides a grand avenue entering the nation's capital passing through a series of historic neighborhoods and crossing historic bridges representing a range of architectural styles and periods. I have already mentioned the innovative early planning and zoning creation of the commercial nodes interspersed with the apartment houses. One important visual feature that resulted was the variation in height marking the distinction between the apartments and the shops - a rhythm of high-low-high is evident as one drives along the avenue.

A change in the zoning combined with a limitation of the height and F.A.R. in P.U.D.s in the Cleveland Park and Woodley Park shopping areas will help to maintain the status quo along this "Special Street" thereby complying with the dictates of the Comprehensive Plan to preserve the historic character of Connecticut Avenue.

3. CONNECTICUT AVENUE IN THE CLEVELAND PARK HISTORIC DISTRICT

Connecticut Avenue is an integral part of the Cleveland Park Historic District designated in November of 1986 and listed on the National Register of Historic Places in April of 1987. It is a valuable historic, architectural, cultural and educational resource of the District of Columbia. It is center of activity for Cleveland Park - like a village square or a main street. From its earliest days Connecticut Avenue was a main entrance into the streetcar suburb. The original developer John Sherman had an architect-designed lodge built where the library stands today to serve the residents of Cleveland Park as meeting space and a place to keep dry while awaiting the streetcar.

The Fire House of 1916 is the oldest building along Connecticut Avenue in Cleveland Park. The first apartment building (Wardman built) joined it in 1919 followed almost immediately by the townhouses next door which turn the corner and ascend Ordway Street. Although zoned commercial Wardman built these townhouses which were occupied primarily as residences from 1923 to 1934. The three townhouses on Ordway were part of the Wardman construction and have only recently begun to be used for commercial activities more appropriate for Connecticut Avenue. (More about this later.)

As more apartment houses were built in the early 1920s, there grew a pressing need for shops located in the neighborhood. 1925 witnessed the opening of the first grocery stores along Connecticut in Cleveland Park. They were one-story with tile roofs and some decorative details. Business was good in the 20s, and additional one-story structures were constructed supplying a variety of goods and services to the residents. Tropea Barbershop is one of the longest established businesses, still frequented today as you can see.

Historically this linear strip of one and two-story businesses, individually maintained, is typical of the 20s type of commercial development in neighborhoods. The Park and Shop of 1930 introduced a radical new idea - the shopping center, one-stop shopping. Food stores, drugstore, hardware store, bakery, laundry, car repair, gas, and even an automobile laundry were available in one spot with a convenient parking lot in front. This introduced the mixed-use, coordinated merchandising concept to Cleveland Park and to the city at large. Many similar shopping centers were constructed following this successful example. This complex solved several problems created by the typical 20s string-street development - traffic congestion along the avenues because of inadequate provision for parking, and intense retail competition resulting in failed businesses and empty buildings. Even today this type of shopping center is enjoying a revival across the country as Richard Longstreth pointed out in the paper he delivered at the April conference of the Society of Architectural Historians in Chicago. The Uptown Theater with adjoining shops, the Ofty building with shops and offices, and the Macklin complex with shops and residences all followed the mixed use concept introduced by the Park and Shop.

Historically Connecticut Avenue in Cleveland Park represents in microcosm the 1920s and 1930s development of retail shops in neighborhoods and the accompanying architectural styles and building types -an important historic resource for the city and one of the main reasons it was included as an integral part of the Cleveland Park Historic District.

Under D.C. Law 2-144 the preservation of the historic character and the historic fabric of the buildings along Connecticut Avenue is mandated. The historic structures can be added to but not destroyed. McDonalds has added a second story to their historic 1930 building without destroying the original facade. They set the second story back so that it is not even visible from the immediate sidewalk. Yes foodstore has purchased this building and is also adding a second story which is set way back, more than halfway back in the building. It too will not be visible from the street so the facade will maintain its original appearance. The owner of Yes has also agreed to remove the inappropriate signage and allow the original facade to be visible. The owner of the Roma has also allowed the original Art Deco aluminum panels to be unveiled, or at least not hidden behind the awning, revealing the glory of its original facade.

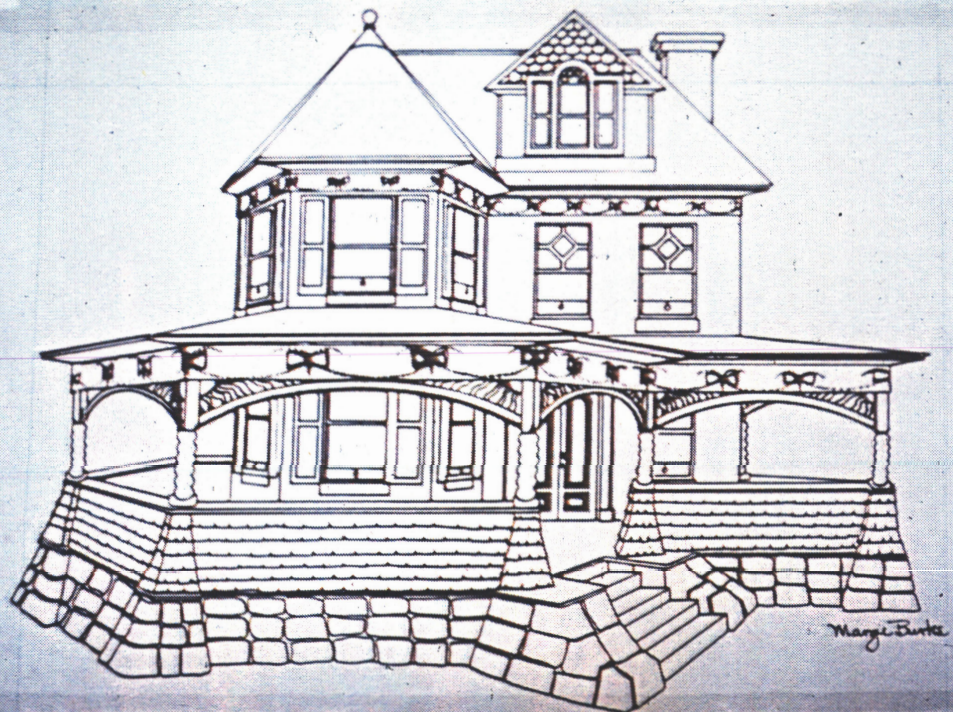
There are a lot of positive signs along Connecticut Avenue, and I think that your preliminary decision to rezone the area has had a lot to do with it. We have had several new businesses appear: the manager of Calliope has just purchased his business and renewed his lease, Yes foodstore is moving here from Georgetown, Bob's ice cream opened a branch here and Wingmasters has expanded the old Chick 'N Bucket. All these actions plus the refurbishing of Peoples and the reopening of the Fishery indicate a new stability in Cleveland Park.

But we are not there yet. The P.U.D. option could destroy much of the fabric of our historic district by encouraging the demolition of the one and two-story buildings and their replacement by six or seven-story office buildings which would be completely out of scale with the historic buildings and the residences and would encourage the wrong type of retail establishments catering to the day-time office workers at the expense of the neighborhood residents. The P.U.D. option also encourages landlords who do not take pride in their buildings because they plan to demolish them and therefore do not maintain them properly for renters nor do they give renters long enough leases so that they are able to remodel their shops.

I would like to close with a few shots of the Spring Valley Shopping area which is zoned C-2-A. This is a small scale shopping center modeled on the Park and Shop and built a few years later. There was a movie theater here on Massachusetts Avenue which was demolished and replaced by this building which is completely out of scale with the adjoining shops and residences on the side streets. It does not create a user-friendly streetscape and it does not respect its neighbors. It did probably bring someone a nice profit. But we're talking about what is good for neighborhoods, what makes them liveable. I recently visited Somerset, Kentucky and was sad to see the town abandoned and replaced by the big shopping malls on the interstate highway. The heart of the community had been cut out. By having zoning which encourages the destruction of the small scale shops and their replacement with large office buildings we may be sanctioning the cutting out of the heart of the Cleveland Park and Woodley Park neighborhoods.

We heartily support the report produced by the Office of Planning and urge you to adopt its recommendations. Placing limits on the height and F.A.R. allowable in P.U.D.s in these two historic communities will help satisfy the requirements of the Comprehensive Plan and of the Historic Preservation Review Board. Let us make models of our in-town liveable historic neighborhoods.

CLEVELAND PARK



HISTORIC DISTRICT

#1

Connecticut Avenue from the Klinge Bridge to Tilden Street is of historic significance as recognized by the fact that it is included in the Cleveland Park Historic District listed on the National Register of Historic Places



#2

3300 Block of Connecticut Avenue (East side)



#3

3400 Block Connecticut Ave (East side)
3501 Connecticut - Park & Shop
3601 Broadmoor



#4

3400 Block Connecticut Ave. (West side)



5

3500 Block Conn. Ave. (West Side)



#6 3309 Conn. Ave - Earliest Grocery Store - 1924