

**Barbara M. Robinson
Sherman Robinson
3933 Morrison St., NW
Washington, DC 20015**

(202) 363-8107
(202) 363-2272 (fax)
broeo@aol.com

02-17

November 10, 2002

Ms. Carol Mitten, Chairman
Zoning Commission
District of Columbia Office of Zoning
441 4th Street, NW, Suite 210-S
Washington, DC 20001

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Dear Chairman Mitten:

We are writing to express our concern about Stonebridge Association's application of October 25, 2002 to upzone Square 1663, Lot 805, from R-5-B to R-5-C -- or what would be, effectively, R-5-D because of the request for 5% additional height and 5% additional density under the proposed PUD. We live in Chevy Chase, DC just east of the Chevy Chase playground and view the Washington Clinic parcel as a gateway to our neighborhood along Western Avenue. Sherman Robinson is a native Washingtonian, who has lived in DC for most of his life and, together, we have lived in DC nearly twenty-five years and at this address for nearly 10 years. Barbara Robinson worked for the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments, our regional planning organization. We care deeply about how this first significant parcel along the DC side of Western Avenue is developed.

We have reviewed the carefully-documented history of zoning and planning decisions for the Friendship Heights neighborhood, which was written by two Friendship Heights, DC neighbors, who are members of the Friendship Heights Organization for Reasonable Development (FhORD). From reading that history, it is evident that the existing zoning is the result of an exemplary land-use planning process in 1974. While that process took place nearly 30 years ago, it correctly anticipated development in the neighborhood, including the impact of Metro, and the importance of ensuring that the character of the neighborhood of single-family dwellings (zoned R-2) was protected by the bedrock planning principle that single family houses should not abut high density commercial, or residential buildings.

Given this history, it seems to us that anyone requesting a zoning change bears the burden of making a compelling case for why the current zoning should be changed. The Stonebridge application does not do so, and the DC Office of Planning's report does not

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explain why they believe that the current R-5-B zoning and the new housing, that could be developed under the current zoning, are not appropriate.

To date, the kind of planning done by the DC Office of Planning concerning the Stonebridge application appears to be planning-by-negotiation, on a parcel-by-parcel basis, rather than the kind of "smart" planning which is reflected in the 1974 Friendship Heights Sectional Development Plan. In our opinion, if zoning is seen as negotiable, then it fails to serve the important purpose of providing stability and certainty about the present and the future scale and character of a neighborhood for residents, potential buyers (both commercial and residential), and developers. Given the size and import of this parcel, we believe that both the developer and the DC Office of Planning need to provide both the neighborhood and the Zoning Commission with an answer to the central question: Why change the zoning? Until that has occurred we hope that the Zoning Commission will approach this parcel with the same care that their predecessors used in 1974.

Thank you for your attention,

Very truly yours,

 

Barbara M. Robinson and Sherman Robinson