

# WASHINGTON REGIONAL NETWORK FOR LIVABLE COMMUNITIES

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Testimony before the District of Columbia Zoning  
Commission regarding:

Case No. 02- 17 PUD, 5401 Western Avenue, NW

by Cheryl Cort  
Washington Regional Network for Livable Communities

December 12, 2002

My name is Cheryl Cort and I represent the Washington Regional Network for Livable Communities (WRN). WRN is a Washington-based organization dedicated to promoting transportation investments, land use patterns and neighborhood designs that enhance existing communities and the environment in the Washington, D.C. region. As a member of the Coalition for Smarter Growth, I am also testifying on their behalf (located at 1777 Church Street, NW, Washington, D.C. 20036).

My organization and the Coalition for Smarter Growth are particularly concerned with how to accommodate the region's growth in jobs and households in a way that makes the most of existing transportation facilities and other urban infrastructure, protects greenspace on the outskirts of the region, and enhances the quality of life of the city and inner suburbs. We are also concerned that redevelopment in urban communities is inclusive – promoting diverse housing choices so that people of all incomes can live in convenient, walkable neighborhoods near transit.

**Given our commitment to quality transit-oriented development, WRN and the Coalition for Smarter Growth support the proposed project at the Washington Clinic site.** We support this project because the Western Avenue-oriented building takes advantage of adding well-designed housing approximately 300 feet from the Friendship Heights Metrorail station and commercial core while respecting the scale of the surrounding neighborhood. We are also very supportive of the developer's recent agreement to add a number of units of below market rate housing as a part of the project. The publicly-accessible open space of the project and the over 100 new housing units will contribute to the vitality of the neighborhood, strengthen the tax base of the District, and accommodate households that might otherwise live in locations less convenient to transit, shops, employment and services. By providing over 100 new homes so close to the Metro station, we believe the proposal takes sufficient advantage of this valuable location. Such proximity to our \$10 billion Metro system is precious and should not be squandered on too little housing. We cannot hope to address our air pollution and traffic congestion problems, or save our diminishing rural resource lands without projects like this.

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While we support this proposal in general, we have several comments and recommendations for improving it.

First, while we applaud the addition of 5 percent of the housing units as below market rate, but we would like to see more of it, and targeted to lower income groups. We understand that D.C. government has done little up to now to make this an expectation for developers, unlike the successful program across the Maryland line – the Moderately Priced Dwelling Units Program in Montgomery County. We hope this is only the beginning for D.C. Office of Planning’s work with private developers to get more moderately priced housing included in new development. We don’t consider 5 percent high enough for a future requirement, and look forward to working with the D.C. government and the Zoning Commission to create an inclusionary housing requirement that better addresses our needs.

Second, less parking is needed at this site. We understand that the high parking ratio is largely in response to community members’ demand. However, we urge reexamination of the trade-offs between the enormous cost of parking (a space might cost \$20,000 to build) and the opportunity to, for example, put that same investment into more units of moderately priced housing.

Third, given the reduction in site imperviousness, and the amount of new open space provided, we are disappointed that a more innovative stormwater management system was not proposed. We suggest that the developer incorporate state-of-the-art but commonly used techniques for stormwater management.

In all, we welcome this proposal as a contribution to smart growth for the neighborhood, city and region.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this project.