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Testimony on Stonebridge – December 16, 2002

ANC 3/4G, Chevy Chase, DC, has been following the negotiations between the Stonebridge developers and the Friendship heights community closely. We have been formally and publicly briefed by both the developer and the opponents of the development. We have seen the size and intrusiveness of the building shrink and the mass get pushed toward Western Avenue. We have also observed that the developer has been flexible and responsive in its discussions with ANC 3E. Our ANC did not focus on the esthetics of the project, but we understand that it will be an attractive building. Smart growth advocates think that it is a worthy project. Yet my ANC voted 5-0-1 against the Stonebridge project. Why did we do that?

The reason, as I see it, is that our community in Chevy Chase, sees month by month, year by year, our quality of life being chipped away at and eroded. We are experiencing greater levels of traffic on our streets, moving at faster speeds. We are having greater difficulty in finding parking. Furthermore, we see no end in sight as Friendship Heights continues to grow. And who can we turn to for solutions to these problems. I can tell you from experience that ANCs push the Department of Transportation, the Department of Planning, the police and other agencies to study the situation, come up with solutions and take action. And yet we can wait years for a basic study of the traffic on Military Road, Western Avenue and other arterials, let alone the back streets. We often wait for years for traffic calming studies, let alone effective action being taken by the city. This may not be the developer's responsibility but it is the operating environment.

Along comes a developer who seeks a PUD. I am betting that Stonebridge has a better chance of getting a PUD approved and an apartment building built long before I see a traffic light put in. We've waited several years for a stop sign. So part of the reason that we voted to oppose the development is that we believe that the developer is getting better service from the city than the citizens.

But another disturbing factor is that the developer claims that the project will have a positive effect on traffic. Yet the developer's own traffic studies appear to be contradictory. From experience the numbers are clearly wrong and anyone with any sense who drives west on Military Road, knows that an average waiting time of less than 30 seconds at Western and Wisconsin during peak demand hours is ridiculous. Furthermore, the issue of whether the site would drive motorists on to side streets was not addressed in the study. This calls into question the developers credibility at least on this issue.

The developer provides a vague list of improvements to help traffic conditions. But we know that the city would not approve or pay for the improvements such as traffic humps on 43rd Street. I am not convinced that the traffic issues associated with the combined apartment building and day care center have been adequately thought through or addressed. In short, my ANC's key concerns are still traffic and its effects on the neighborhood, safety for motorists and pedestrians, and construction impacts.

We are not yet convinced that the developer has addressed these issues adequately

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