

Kaleena Francis Lee
1301-C Adams St. NE
Washington, DC 20018

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DC Board of Zoning Adjustment
441 4th Street NW Suite 200S
Washington, DC 20001, via: zcsubmissions@dc.gov

Re: Support for ZC Case Number 14-18; Mid-City Financial Corporation – 1st Stage PUD & Related Map Amendment at Square 3953, 3954, 4024, and 4025

Dear Mr. Hood and Members of the Commission:

Please accept these comments in support of this large mixed-use redevelopment and the variance necessary to make it feasible. As a resident of the Brentwood and Brookland communities for 6 years now, this proposed development provides a number of benefits to the community at large. The plan as proposed provides the greatest benefit to the surrounding community, as it will be a financially and commercially stable development, able to sustain the offered housing and retail at high standards. Specifically, the plan as presented would (1) provide additional commercial options to an underserved community; (2) support that commercial space, and other neighborhood enterprises with appropriate residential density; (3) provide substantial affordable housing; (4) create an active community that reduces crime; and (5) improve all modes of transit by reconnecting the street grid.

Provides much-needed commercial and retail to an underserved community

The Brentwood and Brookland communities have only recently seen substantial retail investment in the community. However, the neighborhood remains underserved in every category, from dining to general retail categories such as clothing, household goods, and general stores. This plan provides hundreds of thousands of square feet of commercial and retail space, where neighborhood-serving stores and service providers would have access to modern, flexible facilities along a major thoroughfare. This plan provides the opportunity for community residents to shop locally, and will provide an anchor to bring residents from other parts of the area to shop, dine, and otherwise patronize these store and others in the area.

Provides the surrounding residential density necessary to support the included retail and other retail establishments in the larger neighborhood

In order for this retail component, as well as the other commercial and retail offerings in the Brentwood and Brookland communities to be successful, a sufficient number of people must live nearby to support the businesses. The density of this plan recognizes that bringing fresh commercial and retail options to the area will hinge on a large enough nearby community to support the businesses. As we have seen with the Rhode Island Row development, keeping development smaller is detrimental to the advancement of the overall community, as nearly half

the retail space in Rhode Island Row remains unoccupied and without prospects for leasing, years after its completion.

Provides generous affordable housing, keeping long-time residents in their own neighborhood

Another superb element of this proposed development is the extensive affordable housing proposed, double the city requirements and enough to allow all existing residents to continue living in the community. While the problems of low-income-only developments are well documented and mixed-income communities are now a “best practice,” offering more affordable housing than required and a substantial portion of that housing to the poorest of DC residents makes this project stand out from its peers as a model of good urban regeneration.

Once again, however, the size of the overall development is key. If the overall development is made smaller, two possibilities emerge. The amount of affordable housing could decrease, leading to a large loss of affordable housing, a detriment to the city as a whole. Alternatively, the relative proportion of affordable housing could increase, making the location less attractive to retailers and potentially less attractive to market-rate residents. Neither of these outcomes are optimal for the community or the city at large.

Reduces structural elements that induce crime

The current physical structure and layout of Brookland Manor apartments provides ample locations for criminals to hide, flee, and conduct their business out of sight. One needs only take a quick glance at crime statistics for this neighborhood to understand that the currently incarnation of this apartment complex does not work. However, I will highlight one particularly jarring statistic. The 7-11 convenience store at 13th St. and Brentwood Road has experienced theft events *84 times* in the last year. Obviously, it is time for the community to hit the reset button, move on to modern development where activities on the street are in the open and criminals have no place to hide in the shadows, and eyes on the street through retail, recreational, and social options keep everyone safer.

Reconnects the street grid to make transit easier for existing and new residents

Finally, this proposed development reconnects several streets, restoring a portion of the traditional street grid in this area. This not only provides easier access for residents to reach their own homes, but more efficient routes for people to come and go from the neighborhood, using multiple modalities. For example, a pedestrian would no longer have to walk several blocks out of their way to get from Saratoga Ave. between Brentwood Rd. and 14th St. to Rhode Island Ave. One of the best ways to encourage alternative transportation, whether that’s walking, biking, or taking public transit, is to make it easy to use that alternative transportation. Reducing the walk to retail and public transit access points, and improving the ease of coming and going from the neighborhood by any mode, but especially bicycle, can increase those mode shares substantially as people simply have an easier time using the alternative transportation.

I urge the Zoning Commission to approve this application. New housing opportunities like this project are critically important to achieving numerous goals of the city, including providing housing opportunities – both affordable and market rate – to a growing population, providing retail and commercial services to all communities, and creating housing and infrastructure that facilitates the use of alternative transportation.

Sincerely,



Kaleena Francis Lee