

Testimony before the DC Zoning Commission

441 4th Street NW

Re: Support for ZC Case No. 15-16 – 4th and Rhode Island Avenue NE PUD

Testimony of Joseph S. Kakesh

May 19, 2016

Chairman Hood and members of the Commission,

I am writing to express my support for Zoning Case No. 15-16, which will transform an auto-oriented, aging shopping center into a vibrant, walkable mixed-use development that more appropriately leverages the site's proximity to the Rhode Island Avenue Metro station and the Metropolitan Branch Trail, and provides area residents with greater choices with which to get to work, go shopping, access recreation, and do many other activities.

In 2002, I worked with the Washington Regional Network (now part of Coalition for Smarter Growth), and others on a visioning project with the surrounding community to highlight the need to make the area around the Rhode Island Avenue Metro Station more walkable. In particular, we worked to ensure safer and easier access for nearby residents to the Metro Station. In the years that followed, I was thrilled to see more walkable development on the east side of the station and gratified that the city built the pedestrian access bridge across the railroad tracks we advocated for to make sure that residents need not make unsafe shortcuts to reach the Metro station.

The proposed PUD is a wonderful continuation of the city's and the community's efforts to increase safety, accessibility, and walkability in this neighborhood. I am particularly pleased to see that the PUD proposes to add two stairways to connect the Edgewood Commons affordable housing development to the proposed development. These stairways are important amenities for residents of the 792-unit Edgewood Commons and beyond, located up a steep incline to the north of the site.

I have long advocated for increased accessibility for these residents, who have been required to take long, circuitous routes to access bus and train lines, walking all the way down to Fourth Street NE, across a parking lot, or down Rhode Island Avenue and its many curb cuts and vehicle access points, under the dark railroad overpass with its narrow sidewalks, to the station. Some residents had to wait for a Metro bus given how long the walk was, even though their apartment complex was flush with the rail line, and their homes had a clear, close view of the station.

These stairways dramatically decrease the amount of time it takes to get from Edgewood Commons to the Metro station, sometimes by as much as 10 minutes each way. It is thus particularly gratifying to see how responsive MRP has been to the needs of the neighborhood and to increase their connectivity needs. Those 10 minutes can make a dramatic difference to area residents.

I also concur with many others who have supported Zoning Case No. 15-16 more generally in that the proposed development gives our growing city more housing opportunities where they need to be – near a Metro station, near a regional pedestrian/bicycle trail, and in areas where pedestrians can feel safe accessing nearby retail and commercial locations.

I also agree that more affordable housing be provided at the site, more than the minimum that is required under Inclusionary Zoning. In particular, more affordable housing at 50% AMI should be prioritized. The flexibility of the PUD process allows the Zoning Commission to do this.

All in all, however, this is an exciting project that can be the catalyst for major positive change to better meet the needs of both current residents and new DC residents, and I hope the Zoning Commission will give the development its full support. Thank you.

Joe Kakesh

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Submitted on 5/22/2016 by:

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