

December 23, 2018

The Honorable Anthony Hood, Chair
D.C. Zoning Commission
441 4th Street NW, Suite 200S
Washington, D.C. 20001

**RE: Z.C. Case No. 16-23: Valor Development, LLC – Voluntary Design Review
For Square 1499, Lots 802, 803, 806, and 807 (Letter In Opposition)**

Dear Chairman Hood and Commissioners:

I have lived in Spring Valley more than 30 years. My home is about four blocks from the site that is now slated for development if the Zoning Commission approves the application in the above-referenced case. This case would appear to be complex on the surface, but common sense suggests the case is really quite simple.

The building proposed by Valor is simply too big and incompatible with the surrounding low density residential neighborhoods of American University Park and Spring Valley. This project will bring downtown development – or development better suited at a major Metro station – to the Spring Valley and AU Park residential neighborhoods that consist almost solely of single family homes.

Over the last 30 years, the Spring Valley and AU Park neighborhoods have been well-served by a limited commercial zone that at one time included – by today’s standards – a small grocery store. In fact, the neighborhood was served by four grocery stores until the late 1970s. Over time, as large “super stores” opened, the smaller stores in our neighborhood closed. Residents chose to shop at other nearby larger “super” grocery stores that offered more variety and, in so doing, greater convenience – all within a mile of our homes. Ultimately, the last remaining chain grocery store serving our neighborhood abandoned the site that is now being proposed for development.

Because we live in the nation’s capital, we can easily become immune to all the “doublespeak” that is part of our national politics these days. It seems this “doublespeak” may now be seeping into our local affairs, if the record in this case is any indication. We are told by the developer and some smart growth advocates that we should accept a development that is out-of-scale for the neighborhood in order to have the convenience once again of a small grocery store in our neighborhood.

Yet, where is the concern about the existing successful neighborhood retail businesses that will be forced out of business? These businesses have contributed to the vitality of our neighborhood for many years. All for a wish and a hollow promise of several different grocers that Valor has floated to encourage support within the community but – nearly four years later – still has been unable to confirm? At the same time, developers of other new projects along the Wisconsin Avenue corridor have reached formal agreement and announced the opening of two more new grocery stores within a mile of the proposed Valor site.

Valor's response to the concerns that have been raised by neighbors about the excessive size of the proposed building is to sink it about six feet into the ground. That is not a reflection of a developer working with neighbors to ease their concerns. No amount of "doublespeak" can change this conclusion! The massive scale of the proposed building has not really changed at all. No fewer people will be housed and no fewer car and truck trips will be made.

We live in a time when truth telling is considered revolutionary. The truth is that Valor is twisting provisions of the zoning code to force-fit an oversized and incompatible building onto a site with significant limitations. The site is so significantly limited that Valor is attempting – through a secret agreement – to utilize density from a neighboring property that has a federal and local historic designation. The massive out-of-scale development is sited on narrow residential neighborhood streets – streets that cannot even accommodate two-way traffic with cars and/or trucks parked on both sides. Yuma and 48th Streets are not commercial corridors, like Wisconsin or Connecticut Avenues. The reliance on a network of even narrower alleyways to access the site further illustrates the limitations of the site. For those accessing the site on foot or by vehicle, it is a tragedy waiting to happen.

As a neighbor, I cannot support this project. It is not in scale or consistent with the low density residential character of the surrounding neighborhoods. I am not so deprived of grocery store access that I need to impose this type of out-of-scale development on those who live immediately adjacent to the proposed site. This development, as now proposed, will permanently alter the neighborhood surrounding the site and make the AU Park and Spring Valley neighborhoods a far less desirable place to live and raise a family.

Although Valor and the parties are debating some very complex and technical issues in this case that can be argued until everybody is in a state of confusion, I hope that – at the end of the day – given your broad discretion – common sense will guide the Commission in its action.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Tom Smith". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the typed name and address.

Thomas M. Smith
4601 Tilden Street NW
Washington, D.C. 20016