

Doug and Mary Ann Barnes
4820 Brandywine Street, NW
Washington, DC 20016

December 28, 2018

Mr. Anthony Hood, Chairman
District of Columbia Zoning Commission
441 4th Street NW
Suite 210 S
Washington, DC 20001

*Subject: Case Number 16-23, Proposal for Design Review and Development by Valor Development, LLC, Square 1499, Lots 802, 803, 806, 807. **Letter in Opposition***

Dear Chairman Hood,

We are strongly opposed to proposed Valor Development Project, Case Number 16-23,

As background, we are neighbors that live 4 blocks from the Valor development site and frequently walk through the project area and alleyways on our way to or from Spring Valley Shopping Center. We have an intimate knowledge of the site and walk by the area almost daily.

Neighborhood Pedestrian Issues

Unfortunately for pedestrians, this new October, 2018 Valor/Mill Creek building design is worse than the previous January 2018 plans. In the previous plans, there were problems with Windom Walk emptying into the loading dock area, which was eventually acknowledged by the developer after the January 2018 meeting. Instead of improving the previous design, the new plan just does away with the walk and makes pedestrians navigate around the entire circumference of the building lot. With over 400-500 people in the new building, they will be walking to the Spring Valley Shopping Center. The added sidewalks along the alleys are only 3 feet wide and is virtually next to a vertical wall. This building design introduces dangerous conflicts between pedestrians, cars and trucks in the alleyways on two sides of the project. This also will be a significant problem for those in wheelchairs.

The transportation plan indicates that due to the grocery store and the residents of the new building, more cars and trucks will be using this alley space. The grocery store causes about half of this traffic, and is no longer essential for the neighborhood because of new and recently remodeled stores located along Wisconsin Avenue. Due to the projected increase in traffic, the new development is turning the adjacent alleyways into public thoroughfares with inadequately designed facilities for pedestrians.

For the north-south alley, the transportation addendum touts that the project will expand the alleyway to 20 feet. The existing alleyway is 15 feet, but it is surrounded by open space on private land. In fact, the space just south of Yuma Street is close to 60 feet wide building to building. In the new building design, this same space will be reduced to 35 feet and the new building has a high vertical wall along the alley.

The developer claims that it is necessary to squeeze in 214 apartments, 5 townhomes and a grocer into a lot which is a fairly small space to make the building financially viable. This all leads to more cars and trucks going through alleyways that are not meant to carry such extensive traffic. The Comprehensive Traffic Plan for the previous design indicated that the traffic in the alleyways reach volumes present on Yuma and 48th Streets today.

Local Financial and Business Issues

The private financial arrangements being negotiated by Valor Construction with American University and the owners of the Spring Valley Shopping Center will have an impact on the scale and the density of the project. Our view is that if the developer needs over 200 apartments to make the building profitable, then they probably have paid too much for the land, agreements with American University for parking and/or for density transfer from the owners of Spring Valley Shopping Center.

The only known detail is that Valor will lease back 180 parking spaces from American University. Based on the figures in the Gorove/Slade Traffic Addendum, the leased back spaces at market rates (conservatively \$100 per month) means an annual cost to the developer of over 216,000 dollars a year (180 space X 12 months X \$100 per month). Unfortunately, all other financial agreements are secret so there is no way of knowing how they adversely impact the size of the building and how it fits into the neighborhood.

The purchase price of the land and all the peripheral agreements may be driving the developer to construct a building that does not fit in with the residential character of the neighborhood. Thus, neighbors are faced with a problem. The developer states that they need 219 units to make the site financially viable as justification for the mass and scale. When asked to produce the financial documents, Valor indicates that they are private and refuse to show them. Without access to such financial agreements, it is not possible to evaluate *whether the developer has made ill-advised financial decisions* that will undermine the value of the new development for the neighborhood.

One negative consequences of the business decision to build a pedestrian unfriendly building is that the property values of close-in neighbors may decline due to the bulk and scale of the nearby new building. Also, Wagshal's is an iconic Spring Valley Shopping Center business and may have to close some or all of their 3 retail operations due to the new development, sacrificing many local jobs.

These are some of the reasons that **we strongly oppose the current design plans by Valor. We favor a scaled-down building and a more pedestrian-friendly design.**

Sincerely,

Doug and Mary Ann Barnes
4820 Brandywine Street, NW
Washington, DC 20016