

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Suburban-style bank doesn't suit Tenley

Lots of us seem to be asking, "What is going on at the former site of the Outer Circle theater?" As we understand it, the community is getting a brand-new drive-through bank. Ugh! Could anything be less desirable at this location?

We're getting:

- a building expressly designed to generate as many car trips as possible — not the sort of development anyone with an interest in Smart Growth or neighborhood traffic wants to see;
- a suburban building type usually seen in places like Rockville Pike plopped down on Wisconsin Avenue — not the way to encourage lively, safe sidewalks and

pleasant strolls down the neighborhood's "Main Street"; and

- a single-use development — not the mix of shops or offices and apartments that characterizes many active and attractive neighborhood centers.

These sort of auto-oriented facilities are anathema to great streets. The driveways and parking lots are dangerous to pedestrians, the buildings are almost always ugly, and they add nothing to the life of the neighborhood. Fact is, drive-through banks are among the first types of development banned from places like Bethesda Row or the new Rockville Town Center, where architects, planners and developers have successfully designed and built fun urban places practically from scratch.

Why do we have to put up with this? Shouldn't we have a plan for the future of our neighborhood that envisions something

more exciting and entertaining than drive-through banks?

Shouldn't the affected advisory neighborhood commissions be taking a position in opposition to a clearly inappropriate use, an anachronism that just screams tail fins and 35-cents-per-gallon gas?

Apparently not, given the silence that has surrounded this project. Apparently not, since the vocal opponents of most new development and planning for Upper Wisconsin Avenue have told us that existing zoning is all right with them. Apparently there is no reason to raise our expectations for new development in our neighborhood. The next time you are urged to oppose changes to "matter-of-right" zoning, remember that this is what you could get — a drive-through bank. Ugh. We can do a whole lot better.

Ron Eichner
Member, Ward 3 Vision
Steering Committee

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