



COALITION FOR SMARTER GROWTH

February 19, 2009

Mr. Anthony Hood, Chairman
Zoning Commission of the District of Columbia
One Judiciary Square
441 4th Street NW, Suite 210 South
Washington, DC 20001

RE: SUPPORT for ZC 08-15 - Friendship Shopping Center PUD application

Dear Chairman Hood and members of the Commission:

Please accept these comments on behalf of the Coalition for Smarter Growth, a regional organization based in the District of Columbia focused on ensuring transportation and development decisions are made with genuine community involvement and accommodate growth while revitalizing communities, providing more housing and travel choices, and conserving our natural and historic areas.

I am pleased to testify in support of this pedestrian-oriented mixed use redevelopment project. This is a wonderful proposal that is far better than simply replacing an old grocery store with a new one. Thanks to Stop & Shop for making the extra effort to create a truly smart growth project.

We welcome the renewal of a grocery store, lively streetscapes with sidewalk-oriented shops, new public spaces, and housing opportunities, including some affordable ones. We believe this proposal is an asset to the neighborhood, offering attractive uses, buildings and public streetscapes carefully fit into the surrounding context. The project is modest in scale but still that will create a vibrant neighborhood shopping district.

Offering more housing opportunities here reduces regional traffic, takes advantage of bus and Metrorail service, and helps reduce greenhouse gas emissions. According to the 2000 census, workers in this area ride the bus and Metro far more than the regional average. Residents drive less than other lower density neighborhoods farther from extensive bus and rail service like Palisades. Fourteen percent of workers in this census tract ride the bus, 17 percent ride Metro and nearly 10 percent walk all the way to work. A quarter of households in this area don't even own a single car. The new grocery store and other shops will provide better options for nearby residents to walk and bicycle for errands rather than choosing to drive elsewhere. The recently improved 30s bus service offers an opportunity to capture a larger share of travelers, and bring shoppers to the site.

The overall low car ownership rate, high number of carless households and high use of transit and walking to work in the area demonstrate that this project can successfully attract residents who want a convenient urban lifestyle. We support the parking ratios proposed and support the DDOT proposals for reducing vehicle trips including: Zipcar spaces, discounted Zipcar memberships, transit promotion, SmartTrip cards, bicycle parking, showers for workers who bicycle to work. While the applicant appears to have agreed to do most of DDOT's recommendations, we support the full set of Transportation Demand Management (TDM) measures suggested by DDOT. We are disappointed however, that there's little attention given to improving the bus terminus.

This project is important even in a global context. By locating stores and housing here, more people in the region will have the opportunity to reduce their carbon footprint by shopping locally, riding transit and living close to a wealth of destinations. It is highly accessible due to its location on Wisconsin Avenue – a major bus route with a terminus of several lines and a mile walk from the Cleveland Park Metro station. Riding transit, walking or bicycling to work and errands is the single most important way an individual can reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Enabling a person to take transit rather than drive to work reduces a household's carbon footprint by about 25-30 percent. The combined energy efficient location, buildings, and mix of uses make excellent contributions toward shrinking our region's carbon footprint.

Suggested improvements

We think that this proposed development will be a great addition to the neighborhood and provide a vital opportunity to the city and region. I have a few suggestions about how it could be even better.

- 1. Affordable housing should be 10 percent** – We don't see why this project wouldn't offer the full 10 percent to follow Inclusionary Zoning guidelines. The project offers 8 percent of the housing units, affordable to households earning 50 and 80 percent area median income. Thus the income targeting is in line with Inclusionary Zoning standards. For low-rise developments, the set-aside should be 10 percent not 8 percent. Allowing this reduction is a bad precedent.
- 2. Bus station upgrades** – The site should offer upgrades to the bus station – which is currently only a standard shelter. We suggest working with WMATA and DDOT Mass Transit Administration to provide an upgraded shelter with added amenities. We suggest including “next bus” electronic information display at the station and inside the Giant store. This information display could promote using the bus to shoppers, residents and workers.

Again, I'm excited to see this project completed. I urge you to move forward with this project.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Cheryl Cort
Policy Director