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## Testimony to Alexandria City Council in Support of the Heritage at Old Town

Rezoning #2020-00006  
Development Special Use Permit #2020-10032  
Transportation Management Plan Special Use Permit 2020-00084

**February 20, 2020**

**Stewart Schwartz, Executive Director**

Good afternoon, Mayor and Council. Thank you for serving our city during these challenging times.

My name is Stewart Schwartz and I am the Executive Director of the Coalition for Smarter Growth, the leading organization in the D.C. region advocating walkable, inclusive, transit-oriented communities as the most sustainable and equitable way to grow and provide opportunities for all. We are a 24-year-old non-profit with partnerships that span the conservation, affordable housing, social equity, transit, bike/ped, and business sectors. In 2017, we received the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (COG) Regional Partnership Award.

We urge you to approve the Heritage at Old Town.

Alexandria has lost over 90% of its affordable housing over the past two decades. We face a housing affordability crisis in Alexandria and neighboring jurisdictions. Multiple studies demonstrate that we need both more supply and more long-term committed affordable units. This project provides both. Supply is critical to avoid displacement, and a range of tools are needed including leveraging land value and density to ensure we create more affordable units.

We work in multiple jurisdictions in the DC region and we can confirm that the City of Alexandria does its homework. The result here from city and community input is a project that provides the housing we need in a well-designed development, with much improved streetscape, pedestrian connectivity, and park spaces. Alexandria offers a very walkable, mixed-use environment with excellent transit – planned to be even better with the redesigned bus network which will provide frequent all-day, seven day per week service. Far more traffic would be generated through Alexandria if our communities pushed all development out to auto-dependent locations.

The project will buffer the neighborhood from the wide, noisy Route 1 entry to Old Town, and has been designed to step down to the adjacent rowhouses. For nearly 25 years I lived near Braddock Metro in a four-story condo building across from single-family homes, next to townhomes and 7 and 9 story condo buildings, and within sight of much taller buildings. Public housing was just a block away. The neighborhood is wonderful, however, it has lost diversity -- because when those

buildings were built the city did not have the strategies in place to ensure a mix of housing affordability. That's why the new RMF zoning applied here is such an important tool. It enables 197 units of deeply affordable housing by a private developer without a public subsidy, allowing the city to direct its affordable housing funds to other projects, creating additional housing. This level of long-term and deep level of affordability without subsidy is extremely rare and a big benefit of the project.

The pandemic has illustrated just who are our most essential workers and the extreme stress they are under due to high housing prices. The racial equity crisis has demonstrated how poorly we have served people of color in our community and nation. It is time to ensure a more inclusive community for the long-term. We urge you to approve the Heritage at Old Town.

Thank you.