Brookland Neighborhood Civic Association
1502 Otis Street, N.E. Washington, D.C. (202)529-0953

Testimony
Of
Caroline Petti, President
Brookland Neighborhood Civic Association
On
Bill 18-867, "Comprehensive Plan Amendment Act of 2010"

Thank you, Chairman Gray and Members of the Committee of the Whole, for providing this opportunity to submit written testimony on Bill 18-867, the "Comprehensive Plan Amendment Act of 2010."

I am writing specifically about a proposal being advanced to change current zoning requirements, practices, and policies along 12th Street, N.E. in the Brookland neighborhood of northeast Washington, D.C. (See September 28, 2010 Testimony of Joseph Bender and September 28, 2010 Testimony of Lavinia Wohlfarth). As described, the desired effect of the proposal would be the following:

1) Upzone portions of 12th Street, N.E. (and perhaps portions of streets adjacent) from C-1 (Neighborhood shopping and low-density development) to C-2-A (Higher density development, including office, retail, and mixed-use development);
2) Eliminate the Planned Unit Development (PUD) process for new development within this new zone, and;
3) Allow new development within this new higher-density zone to occur as a "matter-of-right".

I urge the Council not to adopt amendments to the Comprehensive Plan that would advance these proposed changes, for the following reasons:

1) There is little to no community support for or understanding of the proposal, its implications, or the changes that would ensue.
2) Under a "matter-of-right" approach, Brookland residents and the Advisory Neighborhood Commission would lose the opportunity for meaningful input into development decisions that could have a dramatic effect on residences adjacent to 12th Street and the quality of neighborhood life, in general.
3) Eliminating the PUD requirements for new development would eliminate the requirement for public benefits and amenities that must now accompany new PUD development.

4) The extent to which denser development will or will not contribute to the "revitalization" of 12th Street is (as it should be) a matter of opinion and debate. The PUD process provides an important venue for weighing competing interests and what's best for developers, what's best for 12th Street, and what's best for the community.
5) The Office of Planning (OP) is not recommending the proposal and it is not part of the bill OP transmitted for Council consideration. "The ink is barely dry" on the Brookland/CUA Metro Station Small Area Plan and that Plan expressly provides for a PUD process for development beyond current zoning.
6) If adopted by the Council, this would be the first change to the Brookland Small Area Plan. If there are to be changes, the priorities advocated for so long by Brookland residents--such as strengthening the requirements for undergrounding utility lines and protecting the Brookland Green--should be addressed first.
7) If the small lot sizes are a barrier to the PUD process, the Zoning Commission has the authority to grant waivers to the minimum lot size requirements if they determine that the project is of exceptional merit and in the best interest of the city.
8) The Office of Planning is considering further changes to the existing PUD lot size requirements. These changes may or not be appropriate—we won't know until we actually see them—but, in any case, the changes should not be effectuated until they are reviewed through a public process, the implications are fully understood, and they are approved by the Zoning Commission.
9) Adoption of the proposal could set a precedent and could set forth a cascade of similar requests from other C-1 areas in Brookland (e.g., along Monroe Street where development is being considered at the Colonel Brooks' Tavern location) and other parts of the city.
10) Upzoning to C-2-A opens the door to types of businesses and facilities currently not permitted (or permitted only by Special Exception) in a C-1 zone including gun shops, antenna towers, gas stations, and parking lots.