Good evening members of the DC Zoning Commission. My name is Thomas Hier. I am here representing Ward 3 Vision, a grassroots organization that advocates for community development based on the principles of Smart Growth and Transit-Oriented Development. Our ultimate goal is to promote and enhance the development of dynamic, vibrant urban communities that are sustainable and engaging places to live, work and play. Our website is www.ward3vision.org.

We are testifying in favor of the proposed PUD project. As you know, the project is being developed without parking, and I would like to address that directly. Because the new building is being constructed on top of the existing foundation, rather than by fully excavating the site and starting anew, the developer presented an interesting choice to the community – reuse the current substructure for parking or adapt it for retail uses. As you know or will learn, the ANC chose retail, and Ward 3 Vision wholeheartedly supports this choice.

Here’s why….With its location one block from Metro, it seems obvious that the best use for ground level space is for retail, not a parking garage. Parking facilities suck the life from a streetscape, and Tenleytown, with its history of mediocre and uninspired retail offerings will benefit much more from neighborhood-serving retail establishments and public spaces that can enliven the neighborhood.

We are not oblivious to the concerns that have been expressed about building a residential project without parking. But we would like to place those concerns in context – first in terms of societal change, and second in terms of the PUD itself.

Societal Change: From Cars to Multi-Modal Living

Today, it is viewed as unusual to build a residential project without parking. But it was not always thus – there are examples in many neighborhoods in DC of multi-family residential buildings without parking – built during times when the car did not dominate all other transportation modes. In today’s and tomorrow’s world – at least in cities – we are advancing beyond, or perhaps returning to, a world that is not car-dominated but rather multi-modal. There are simply many more options now, and with mobile technologies and other developments, people can better align their “getting around” needs with options available to them. This is particularly true of younger folks – they Metro, they bike, they Zip Car, they Car-2-Go, they Uber – anything other than buying, insuring and gassing up a car. Numerous articles have been written on the subject, e.g.:
From The New York Times Carmakers Try to Figure Out the New Generation – "The digital generation is apathetic about cars... The shift in the market reflects not only competition from smartphones and other technology, but also the growth in the number of people around the globe who are living in urban areas. Cars are often unnecessary or even burdensome in places where there is good mass transit or networks of bicycle lanes of the kind that cities like New York and Paris have expanded in recent years."

From Wards Auto – The Information Center For and About the Global Auto Industry, Getting "the Kids" Interested in Cars – "When I was 16 years old, getting a drivers license was practically a rite of passage. It meant a lot to be able to drive a car. Not anymore. Today, many young people are not at all interested in cars. They don't even aspire to own one. Instead, they are passionately devoted to their smartphones and iPads, as passionate as an earlier generation was to their flat heads and small blocks."

I also know this from my professional work as a campus planner, where I have seen this trend emerging over the past decade, in focus groups and surveys that I have conducted with undergraduate and graduate students on lifestyle topics that include transit and car ownership.

The PUD
Let me also address concerns in the context of the specific terms of the PUD. With any PUD, we know that one has to weigh the elements that have caused a developer to seek PUD status (in this case, elements including parking relief) against the benefits and mitigation factors proposed as offsetting measures. On that score, a few points:

• First, this is, relatively speaking, a fairly small project – 60 units. At worst, its impact on the neighborhood, given the mitigation measures the developer is proposing (including restrictive lease clauses, prohibitions on Residential Parking Permits, etc.) should be negligible. At best, we believe it presents optimal conditions for a development that is predicated on the reality of today's city dwellers rather than on a traditional project that automatically assumes the dominance of a car in a resident's life.

• Second, by virtue of several of the project’s characteristics – the fact that it is a rental, overall unit sizes, location one block from Metro – it is likely to have strong appeal among younger demographics, including students from the American University Law School which, after its move, will be just a few short blocks away. As I've noted already, this is a demographic that eschews car ownership in favor of alternative transportation modes.

• Third, in addition to the proposed mitigation measures, we think that the proposed amenities – the potential for undergrounding utilities, the variety of efforts by the developer to encourage multi-modal options (e.g., the Resident Transportation Coordinator, initial funding of

2 http://wardsauto.com/blog/getting-kids-interested-cars
BikeShare memberships, transit subsidies, etc.), and certainly the public space enhancements both on-site and across the street, in addition to the proposed emphasis on ground floor retail – far outweigh any potential negative impacts related to the parking exemption.

We hope you will share our enthusiasm for a project that challenges traditional assumptions about transportation in the face of solid evidence that not only is today’s world not that of our father’s Oldsmobile, but that the transportation modes for today’s and tomorrow’s dads – and moms – could just as easily be a bike, a bus, a streetcar, or something rented and shared through a smartphone.

Thank you for your time.

Respectfully submitted,

Thomas C. Hier
Chair, Steering Committee
Ward 3 Vision