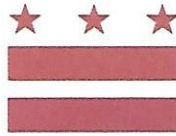


Government of the District of Columbia
ADVISORY NEIGHBORHOOD COMMISSION 3F
Van Ness ▪ North Cleveland Park ▪ Wakefield ▪ Forest Hills

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3F02 – Shirley Adelstein, Treasurer
3F03 – Naomi Rutenberg
3F04 – Deirdre P Brown
3F05 – Andrea Molod, Secretary
3F06 – William Sittig
3F07 – Patrick Jakopchek, Chair



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To: Zoning Commission, DC Office of Zoning
Cc: Office of Planning
Re: Z.C. Case No. 17-22 (Soapstone Valley Ventures, LLC – Consolidated PUD and Related Map Amendment @ Square 2041, Lots 22 and 23)
Date: February 5, 2018

Dear Members of the Zoning Commission,

In lieu of a set down report, ANC3F is sending this letter to bring the following issues regarding ZC Case No. 17-22 to the attention of the Zoning Commission.

1. ANC3F supports that the case be set down for a public hearing.
2. Two aspects of the original concept presented to the neighborhood -- a) orientation towards 32nd Street NW and b) the occupancy of the landmarked house by Rock Creek Conservancy (RCC) -- connected the property and Soapstone Valley / Rock Creek Park. The location of two of the six heritage trees on the property led the applicant to re-orient the houses towards Albemarle and Appleton Streets NW and reduce the number from eight to six. In addition, RCC subsequently determined that leasing the landmark house for their headquarters was not viable for the organization. The removal of these elements changed the original concept.
3. The applicant, Soapstone Valley Ventures, has participated in multiple consultations with the ANC and neighbors regarding the development of the property. There have been eight meetings, including appearances at five ANC meetings (both regular and special community meetings).
4. Community feedback led to a second re-design that lowered the heights of the homes, reduced the footprint of the single-family home by approximately 20%, and altered the front and rear setback of the single-family house. The applicant added increased landscaping in response to a request from one near neighbor to screen the new homes with trees.
5. The applicant has received input from the ANC and community on the proposed public amenities and benefits.

6. The applicant continues to be available to meet with neighbors and the ANC.
7. We know of no near neighbors who support the current PUD plan but some other neighbors and members of the community have expressed their support.
8. Outstanding neighborhood and community concerns, include, but are not limited to the following comments submitted by community members to the ANC:
 - a. The requested zoning change from single detached houses on large lots to five row houses and one single house is excessive development on this lot and in the Forest Hills neighborhood.
 - b. This case will establish precedent and the Office of Zoning could look to it to allow additional increased massing and density exceptions in the future, shifting the baseline for other developments.
 - c. The development threatens the “park-like” atmosphere that exists as one journeys east from Connecticut Avenue along Albemarle Street. Neighbors place particular significance on this site’s position as the “Gateway to Forest Hills”, with its open space, sweeping view of the landmarked house, tall trees and continuity to Rock Creek Park.
 - d. The current plan insufficiently outlines details related to landscaping and exterior design. The importance of the property as a whole entity and neighborhood gateway, merits a unifying landscape plan for the entire site that addresses the amount of open space and trees that will be lost.
 - e. The houses on Albemarle and Appleton Streets are too close to the street, with too little setback. This proposed siting contradicts the original intent when the neighborhood was built—making the requested zoning relief a more outsize request than it might be in other neighborhoods. The lack of setback makes the townhouse construction more imposing and reduces planting space for vegetation that would soften the buildings’ impact.
 - f. The existing landmarked house will be surrounded by six houses that will “strangle it.”
 - g. Because of the topology of the site, the pond at the bottom of the hill adjacent to Albemarle Street serves a major storm water drainage function for the landmarked house. It becomes a source of stagnant water after a rainfall, and thus rampant breeding ground for mosquitoes. The applicant intends to convert this pond into a “rain garden” to enhance storm water management. One neighbor has requested details on who will be responsible for creating this rain garden, when it will be constructed, and who will be responsible for maintaining it.
 - h. The value of some of the proffered public benefits, in particular, the small public green space proposed for the property, is disputed.
 - i. Some neighbors have asked for further exploration of siting the townhouses on 32nd Street NW, for example, considering options like pier and grade beam

construction, that would allow the houses to face this direction without threatening the roots of the heritage trees on the site. A siting on 32nd St would open this street to walkability, vibrancy and increased street life while preserving the open space and trees in front of and back of the landmarked house.

- j. By right, a developer can build two (perhaps three) detached, single-family homes on the site in addition to the existing landmarked house. The current R-8 zoning is more in keeping with the character of the neighborhood (while allowing for tripling of the housing stock and potential for taxes on the property).
9. Positive aspects identified by members of the community, include, but are not limited to the following comments submitted by community members to the ANC:
- a. Given the large apartment building on the west side of 32nd Street NW, townhouses could be considered as transitional infill from the apartments to the single-family homes in the neighborhood.
 - b. The applicant has incorporated input from the Historic Preservation Office on the design and siting of the houses and the materials to protect the views and enhance consistency with the landmarked house.
 - c. The applicant has incorporated the input of neighbors on Appleton St NW, and reduced the square footage of the single-family house and moved it back from the street.
 - d. The site is one block from the Van Ness Main Street corridor and positioned for walkability to public transportation and local businesses. The development includes off street parking only, much if it out of sight underneath the proposed homes.
 - e. The proffered benefits of improving the overlook to Soapstone Valley Park and adding a crosswalk on Albemarle are highly desired by the neighborhood.
 - f. Developing this site as part of a PUD provides an opportunity for considerable input from the neighborhood, as well as city agencies. This input would be more challenging or impossible with by right development. Some community members have expressed concern about recent by right development in the Forest Hills neighborhood and support the opportunity for community input when a site is developed as a PUD.

As there are still several concerns to be resolved, the ANC will continue to encourage community input, further revisions to the PUD application and will submit future comment to the Zoning Commission. The ANC would like to reach agreement between the community and the applicant prior to the hearing and the ANC will continue to encourage a meeting of the minds.

ANC 3F discussed and approved this resolution at its meeting on February 5, 2018, which was properly noticed and at which a quorum was present, by a vote of 7 in favor, 0 opposed, and 0 abstaining.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Naomi Rutenberg", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Naomi Rutenberg
Commissioner – ANC 3F03

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Patrick Jakopchek", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Patrick Jakopchek
Chair – ANC 3F07