



COALITION FOR SMARTER GROWTH

September 30, 2008

Harriet Tregoning
Director, D.C. Office of Planning
Director, D.C. Office of Planning
801 North Capitol Street, NE, Suite 4000
Washington, D.C. 20002

RE: Comments on the Draft Brookland/CUA Metro Station Small Area Plan

Dear Director Tregoning:

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.

We would like to express our overall enthusiasm for this plan. We are gratified that the Office of Planning has invested in this thoughtful planning effort to map the future of the Metro station area and the revitalization of the 12th Street Main Street commercial core. We commend the Office of Planning for the quality of this plan and public engagement process. This effort is especially welcome after a misguided action by WMATA when it identified a developer for its station area land, with no vision, no plan, and no public input. While we have long viewed the station area as a poor quality environment for Metro riders, bus passengers and the community, the original action by WMATA was premature. Now, the city has provided an extensive and thoughtful process to work with the neighborhood and other stakeholders to guide redevelopment to meet community goals, and broader goals to address our city's and region's need for more housing and jobs near Metro. This plan also offers a vision for how a neighborhood Metro station helps reach our goals to reduce global warming by giving more people the chance to walk, bicycle and ride transit for more of their trips.

The challenge of this plan is the implementation, as many elements will require substantial resources. We commend this station planning effort as a greatly needed focus on how to leverage the opportunity of the Metro station to strengthen existing businesses, offer new retail options and improve public spaces to enrich community life. Providing enough new housing opportunities here is critical to supporting the existing and desired new retail. The new mix of housing and businesses will animate the Metro station area, public spaces and 12th Street corridor, offering new vitality, sense of community and safety.

We would like highlight a number of the features of the plan and make a few recommendations.

- **Reestablishing the street connections:** We agree with the plan's strong emphasis on reestablishing the street network and creating stronger connections to the Metro station entrance with the relocation of the Metro portals. We agree that this is essential to greater walkability, reduced vehicle trips and stronger local businesses. The plan improves the visual and streetscape connections between the Metro station and 12th Street Main Street district.

This leverages the Metro station to boost the viability of the 12th Street commercial corridor.

- **Mixed use development around the Metro station:** Given the neighborhood’s slight decline in population, adding new housing, and focusing higher density housing close to the Metro and housing above ground-floor retail can help reverse this decline in population and local customers for small businesses. This new housing will provide more customers to shop at local stores and provide demand for new retail.
- **Animated public spaces and new green spaces:** The plan rightly emphasizes creating true public and community meeting places. The plaza at the Metro station, animated and framed by adjacent buildings with retail will generate an active meeting place for residents, commuters and visitors. By creating a mix of uses and inviting spaces with elements that encourage people to linger, meet a friend, enjoy a coffee or snack, the plaza area will offer a safe and comfortable place that is a gateway to surrounding businesses. The plan reclaims the public importance of the Brooks Mansion and grounds by integrating them into the Metro entrance as a front door to the neighborhood.
- **Bus bays on the street rather than loops:** We strongly support this approach that corrects the old suburban approach of the past. We believe this is a model for other neighborhood stations. This approach seeks to better weave the entrance of the Metro station and bus facilities into the fabric of the community.

Our Recommendations:

- **Funding Public Improvements:** The plan, specifically “Section 6: Recommendations & Implementation,” should be more specific about how to pay for public improvements, including new street connections, plazas, greenspaces, streetscaping and utility undergrounding. What agency action is responsible through what kind of project or process can be stated for a number of the recommendations. For example, the WMATA joint development request for proposals or qualifications can include the changes to the station area identified in the plan. A DDOT streetscape project timeline can be provided.

While some funds should be available as part of a public works budget, a WMATA joint development project or targeted allocations, additional resources are likely to be needed. We suggest creating a “Community Benefits District” that could receive and allocate contributions from new development (especially PUDs) to support community-wide goals established in this plan such as streetscape improvements and utility undergrounding for 12th Street Main Street commercial core. It is unclear that infill or redevelopment along 12th Street would generate sufficient resources to do this. Thus creating a larger benefits district that includes areas where substantial redevelopment is likely could help to implement the priorities of the plan along 12th Street, and other priorities not directly adjacent to a possible PUD. Maintaining much of the existing building stock along 12th Street as it is could have the benefit of offering lower cost space for small eclectic retailers, while new and more expensive space would be available at the Metro station. Thus rather than requiring PUDs to offer discounted commercial space in new development, using developer contributions to put into improving 12th Street might be a better use of resources to help small local businesses.

- **Parking & Transportation Demand Management:** The plan should provide stronger guidance on better management of parking and traffic reduction strategies. For new development, the plan should require Transportation Management Plans that reduce vehicle

trips and vehicle ownership by providing SmarTrip cards loaded with substantial value, carsharing vehicles and memberships, showers and changing facilities for employees to encourage bicycling, expanded bicycle parking, along with other measures. Even bike sharing facilities can be part of these transportation demand management plans. These measures reduce the need for private vehicle parking which also reduces driving. Shared parking should be required or encouraged, using Arlington County as a model.

On-street parking can be better managed by pricing and operating meters during hours to optimize availability for customers. Multi-space meters should be installed and possibly funded through developer contributions. Multi-space meters should be considered to control spillover parking demand onto residential streets adjacent to commercial streets if spillover is or becomes a problem. The Community Benefits District could be funded from additional meter revenues from performance pricing. The Nationals Stadium parking management pilot project and Old Pasadena, California can serve as models.

- **Transportation Improvements:** While the plan provides several recommendations to improve pedestrian and bicycling conditions which we commend, its recommendations regarding signal timing should be clarified. It is unclear from the recommendations that the needs of pedestrians are considered for signal retiming. New practices in multi-modal performance measures should be adopted and used as a matter of routine by DDOT and transportation consultants. This would clear up the question of how signal timing would affect the different modes.

Conclusion

Again, we want to commend the DC Office of Planning and the Brookland community for this exemplary Metro station area and neighborhood plan. We look forward to helping achieve its goals.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Cheryl Cort
Policy Director
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