

**Scott Palace**  
4450 S. Park Ave., Apt 1213  
Chevy Chase, MD 20815

September 21, 2021

The Honorable Casey Anderson  
Chair, Montgomery County Planning Board  
2425 Reedie Dr., 14th Floor  
Wheaton, MD 20902

Dear Chair Anderson,

I live at the Highland House Apartments, located directly across the street from the proposed redevelopment of 5500 Wisconsin Avenue in Friendship Heights. I am excited about Donohoe Development and Carr City Center's redevelopment plans and hope that you will approve their Sketch Plan application.

I have a unique perspective as someone who walks and uses transit instead of driving a car, as a renter who would like to remain in Friendship Heights and a resident who lives on South Park Avenue.

First, Friendship Heights has the potential to be so much more than it is today. Its location close to transit makes it convenient for people like me who don't drive. But we need more shops and restaurants to serve our needs within walking distance, particularly because so many locations have closed over the past few years. The applicant's plans for locally-serving retail and dining is just what our community needs to make it an even more walkable place to live.

Secondly, I have been renting an apartment at the Highland House for four years. I'd like to remain in Friendship Heights, but most of the apartment buildings were built in the 1970s and are showing their age. Even though many of the buildings underwent some level of renovation, they don't offer the up-to-date design and amenities that the proposed new apartment building will offer. Consequently, I started looking outside of Friendship Heights for a more modern, up-to-date place to live, even though I prefer to stay in the Village. This new building will encourage people to stay in Friendship Heights and will attract others to move here, which can only be good for our community. After learning of this proposal, I decided to remain here and hope to be one of its first residents!

Third, I'd like to touch on the traffic issue on South Park Avenue, as some people are saying the proposal will make traffic worse. I live on South Park so I have a first-hand view of traffic patterns on the street. It's interesting to me that people talk about South Park as having a

major traffic problem. Yes, there are some cars who may need to wait for a second light to enter Wisconsin Avenue because of people blocking lanes for deliveries to the Highland House, but this doesn't happen often enough to consider it a problem. In any case, Donohoe's and Carr's plans to move all deliveries off of South Park to a "Woonerf" is an excellent way to minimize traffic impact.

I understand some people feel that the proposal isn't compatible with the Village. I strongly disagree. We have all types of high-rise buildings in Friendship Heights, some even taller than the 18 stories proposed for the new apartment building. And the building has been designed to be as unobtrusive as possible, keeping our park in sunlight and making our sidewalks more inviting, safe and attractive. The applicant did an excellent job designing a project that fits well in our community. It is most certainly compatible with the neighborhood.

The proposed redevelopment of 5500 Wisconsin Avenue can only bring good things to Friendship Heights and make our community an even better place to live. For these reasons, I strongly support the Sketch Plan application and hope you will too.

Thank you for considering my request.

Sincerely,



Scott Palace

cc: Grace Bogdan  
Stephanie Dickel  
Elza Hisel-McCoy

## VILLAGE OF FRIENDSHIP HEIGHTS

### VILLAGE COUNCIL

MELANIE ROSE WHITE, *Mayor*  
MICHAEL MEZEY, *Chairman*  
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CAROLINA ZUMARAN-JONES, *Historian*  
JULIAN P. MANSFIELD, *Village Manager*

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November 1, 2021

Casey Anderson, Chair  
and Members of the Montgomery County Planning Board  
2425 Reedie Drive  
Silver Spring, MD 20902

### Re: 5500 Wisconsin Ave. Development Sketch Plan

On October 26, 2021, the Friendship Heights Village Council, after public hearing, voted 5-2 to **OPPOSE** the sketch plan for 5500 Wisconsin Avenue. The disapproval was based primarily on two concerns: (1) height of the proposed new building and (2) the absence of provisions for safe and adequate vehicular, pedestrian, bicycle circulation as well as safe and adequate parking and loading.

The Council very much favors redevelopment of this site. The Council believes that its concerns can be mitigated by reasonable changes to the plan. The Council has suggested changes to the developers who, at least to date, have not accepted the suggestions. **We urge the Planning Board to deny the sketch plan as presently proposed, or at a minimum, approve the plan with binding conditions sufficient to assure the Council that the project as ultimately approved and constructed will have the mitigating features requested.**

### I. HEIGHT

1. The proposed new apartment building will be located at the highest point in Friendship Heights, protruding 213 feet into the air. It will appear as a 21-story building.

- the first 6 stories occupy the full site extending to the sidewalks of the 3 streets it borders, Wisc. Ave., S. Park Ave., Hills Plaza;
- 12 more stories, set back from the sidewalks, on top of the wider 6 stories (these 18 stories are 185 ft in elevation);
- 2 rooftop stories of 10 feet each, ( total 205 ft in elevation);
- plus 8 additional feet due to topography (total 213 ft in elevation)

2. The building will protrude like a sore thumb above the roofline of neighboring buildings along the west side of Wisconsin Ave. It will be the tallest building on Wisconsin Ave. south to the Potomac River. The building adjacent to the site to north is downhill and 12 stories (Marriott Hotel) and next to the Marriott, further downhill, is the Chevy Chase Medical Bldg of 14 stories; adjacent to the proposed building, to the south, is the Highland House, 15 stories and next to that, the 14-story Barlow Bldg.



*Photo No. 1 left: line of buildings along Wisc. Ave; furthest building on left (north) is Ch. Ch. Bldg, before that building is Highland House; between those buildings is the 12 story Marriott Hotel (unseen) and the site of the proposed building (unseen)*

3. The site of the proposed building, between the Marriott Hotel and the Highland House, is presently occupied by retail stores one story in height. The open space above these stores is the only break in the wall of buildings lining the west side of Wisconsin Ave, permitting light, air and a view of the sky. The site is at the top of the hill of the Village's main internal street, North Park Avenue, and affords one walking east on N. Park uphill toward Wisconsin Avenue the only unobstructed view of open space and a clear view of the sky. A 213ft high building will not only obstruct this last remaining open space and view of the sky, but will loom over the Village Center, its park and N. Park Ave.



*Photo No. 2 left: view from near the top of hill (east) on N. Park Ave, facing open space above site. In front of site is the Village Center, with its park, to the right (unseen); to the left of the site is 12 story Marriott Hotel; in front of hotel is 8 story Brighton Gardens Assisted Living; on N. Park Ave to the right is the Willoughby building.*



The Council recognizes a multistory structure may be constructed on the site, and, as noted, the Council favors such development. However, this plan's proposed height is too extreme.

4. Additional adverse consequences from such a tall building arise from the fact that the building confronts the Highland House apartments on the opposite side of the relatively narrow S. Park Ave. The 15 stories of apartments in the Highland House will look directly into the 18 stories of the proposed building's apartments and vice versa.



*Photo No. 3 above: 15 story Highland House Apartment house occupying an entire block of S. Park Ave. The proposed new building will occupy the entire block of the opposite side of the street.*

Further, the height of the proposed building confronting a 15 story building will "canyonize" the street, affecting not only views but reducing light on the entire block of S. Park Ave. and otherwise making it aesthetically unattractive. The Village already experiences the negative effects of such "canyonization" (see photo No. 4 below.) Its main internal street, N. Park Ave, is lined with high rises, blocking open space, views from dwelling units, sun, light, air, making the street not an aesthetically pleasing one. As discussed below, a principal purpose of the Sector Plan is to preclude the re-creation of such conditions.



Photo No. 4 left:  
Downhill, western end of  
N. Park Ave, the former  
Irene straight ahead (16  
stories), on left 4620  
Condominiums (16  
stories), on right 4615  
Apartments (16 stories).

5. The height of the proposed building is exactly the type height the Sector Plan precludes. Prior to the adoption of the 1974 Sector Plan, the Village of Friendship Heights had been extensively developed with very tall and dense buildings permitted under the then code, e.g. the (former) Irene, 16 stories, FAR 6.6; Barlow Bldg, 14 stories, FAR 5.10. The 1974 Sector Plan found this level of development excessive and **downzoned** all parcels in the Village to a *maximum height of 90 ft and a maximum FAR of 2.0* by applying the newly adopted CBD-1 (optional) zone.

The current 1998 Sector Plan **reconfirms** the downzoning of the 90 ft height limit and 2.0 FAR. Pages 35-36 show all parcels in the Village continue to be zoned CBD-1. The 1998 plan notes (p-140):

- The 1974 Sector Plan recommended *medium density* commercial and office use of the parcels *nearest to the Metro station and lower density* primarily residential uses for the undeveloped properties further from the station." (Emphasis added.)

In confirming the down zoning, the current plan notes (p. xxviii):

- **"In a densely built-up area like Friendship Heights, open space is critical to the quality of life".** (Emphasis added.)

Thus, a main principle of the current plan is to (p. 31) :

- *Preserve and enhance the environment for residents of high rise buildings....This principle can be achieved... by limiting the height of new buildings close to high rise apartments to preserve views."*(Emphasis added.)

Of course, in order to approve a sketch plan, the Board must find that the plan "substantially conforms" to the Sector Plan. Sec. 59.7.3.3 E.2. Also for approval, the Board must find the plan is "compatible" with existing development. (E. 5) Not only does the height render the plan unable to meet these requirements, but if it were nevertheless approved, it would serve as a precedent for ignoring the Sector Plan's height and compatibility provisions and other protections for the Village on the remaining developable sites.

6. The Council is aware that since the adoption of the Sector Plan zoning, zoning changes have been made which may permit averaging. A parcel with zone height limit of 90 ft could have buildings or portions of building more than 90 ft providing that the whole project averages 90 ft. The fact that a zone may permit a higher height, of course, does not nullify a Sector Plan height limit requirement nor does it permit such development as a matter the right. Other factors must be considered such as compatibility with existing development as well as conformity with the Sector Plan. Permitting any building higher than 90 ft here is particularly inappropriate since the Sector Plan recommends a 90 ft height limit with the purpose of preventing any more buildings over 90ft in height.\*

Similarly, the Council is aware that in 2014 new zones replaced the old zones. Although it was represented that only the names of the zones were being changed, not the substance, the FAR of the CBD-1 zone was changed from 2.0 to 3.0, for reasons that appear to be in error. In any event, the developer is proposing an effective FAR of 5.14! The actual size of the site that is to be redeveloped is 79,012 sq. ft. The development is 406,563 sq. ft. which yields an FAR of 5.14. The developers' claim the FAR is only 3.42, including more FAR for additional MPDU's. Their lower FAR is based upon using an additional approximately 40,400 sq. ft of land asserted to have been dedicated for public roads, starting as far back as the 18th century. However, the actual number of sq. ft on the parcel, the actual the size of the site as one views it, is 79,012 sq. ft with over 406,00 sq ft on it, and therefore it appears as having an FAR in excess of 5.0. Again, the fact that a zone may permit a higher FAR does not confer a right to develop a project to the maximum FAR nor permit ignoring of the Sector' Plan's FAR limitations, here a maximum FAR of 2.0.

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\* The 90 ft average height of the entire development, total square footage, square footage of the parcels claimed to have been dedicated for roads in the past qualifying to be considered for FAR purposes, and the location of shadows cast by the high-rise building are only the developers' conclusions. The specifications and other details necessary to be able to independently verify these conclusions have not been submitted with the sketch plan application. Our review of the limited data has disclosed apparent errors raising questions about the accuracy of the developers' conclusions. The developers have denied our request for the needed information which, of course, does not inspire confidence in the correctness of their conclusions. Such information is essential for the staff, Board and DPS to have in order to know correctly what they are asked to approve and enforce. The necessity of this information is discussed in more detail in the email of the Village's attorney, Norman Knopf, of September 10, 2021 to Grace Bogdan.



7. Representatives of the Village have made suggested changes to the sketch plan that could mitigate the Village's concerns about height and lead to avoiding opposition and litigation. For example, one suggestion is that the height be significantly reduced. To help recover some of the reduced square footage, one or two floors—e.g. 7th and 8th, now part of the narrower tower—could be expanded to the current size of floors 6, and below. While this will recoup only a small percentage of the reduced square footage, the building would remain a substantial one with an FAR closer to 5.0 than the 2.0 of the Sector Plan. Since the developers, at least to date, have made no height changes to their plans, we ask that the Board: (i) not approve the plan at the November 18th hearing; or (ii) continue the hearing to give the developers time to make revisions; or (iii) condition approval of the plan on a requirement of a significant reduction in the height of the apartment building to bring it more in conformity with the Sector Plan and more compatible with existing development. The Village's other concerns and conditions are addressed below.

## **II. VEHICULAR, PEDESTRIAN, BICYCLE, CIRCULATION PARKING AND LOADING**

1. Friendship Heights Village is responsible for the construction, regulation and maintenance of its streets. Most of the buildings in the Village were constructed with no, or inadequate, provisions for pick-up and drop-off of residents and guests, or parking for visitors, delivery vehicles, service vehicles, mail trucks, moving trucks, garbage trucks, etc. As a result, there are numerous problems on the streets: pick-up and drop off in the street where no area for this on this on site; back-up of vehicles on the street waiting to access to the front door where there is inadequate pick-up and drop-off area on site; delivery and service vehicles lining the street, frequently double parked, parked in "No Parking" areas or cruising the streets in search of a parking space; stopped moving trucks and garbage trucks blocking street traffic. Joining these cruising vehicles in search of a parking space are cars of visitors to the residential buildings that have no or very limited visitor parking. This creates unsafe conditions for vehicles and pedestrians. Further, the Village is experiencing traffic congestion at the intersections of S. Park and Wisc. Avenues, S. Park Ave. and Hills Plaza, Somerset Terrace at Wisc. Ave. One frequently waits through several Wisconsin Ave traffic light cycles before being able to proceed through the intersection.

2. The Village was delighted when the developers represented that their proposed plan would not exacerbate these problems but in fact would improve all conditions by the creation of a new street between the hotel and the apartment building. The new street would help alleviate traffic congestion onto Wisconsin Avenue and provide adequate parking space for all vehicles. In addition, it was represented this street would provide safe pedestrian and bicycle paths and areas for outdoor restaurant seating along the side of the road. However, analysis shows the street is narrow and substantial portions will necessarily be devoted to the entrance/exit areas for the apartment house garage, garbage truck pick-up area, moving truck loading / unloading area, and traffic lanes to accommodate two way traffic. There seems to be little to no room for delivery/service



vehicles, visitor/guest parking, adequate apartment building pick-up and drop-off, bicycle paths, pedestrian paths, and outdoor restaurant seating. The Village is concerned that the new road appears more likely to become a congested, unpleasing alley with cars backed up to enter the alley from The Hills Plaza. In addition, cars of visitors and delivery and service vehicles will line Hills Plaza and other Village streets as well as pick-up and drop-off occurring in the streets. Comments by various agencies to the DRC note the inability of the proposed new road to achieve all the purposes claimed. Even the developers' responding comments indicate that revisions to the new road are needed.

3. The developers have presented no workable plan that resolve these problems. Their response to the Village is that things will be worked out later, at the site plan stage, and we must wait. However, the zoning code expressly requires that before any sketch plan approval:

- "... the Planning Board must find ....the sketch plan...provide[s] satisfactory general vehicular, pedestrian, and bicyclist access, circulation, parking and loading;" (Sec. 59.7.3.3E. 6)

Such a finding cannot be made. The Village believes that a satisfactory solution must be found now, before any approval of the sketch plan, not only because the law requires it but because it is far from certain that such a plan can be devised at all, or if it can, the siting of the building and/or its total square footage may need to be changed. This has to be resolved now to preclude the developers from claiming before the Board or a court at a later stage that such needed changes cannot be made as the siting and square are footage had been settled by approval of the sketch plan.

4. Representatives of the Village have made suggestions for changes to the sketch which might mitigate the circulation/parking/loading problems. These include:

- i. Provide adequate parking areas in the garage for visitors and service vehicles as well as multiple loading/unloading docks for moving trucks servicing the 380 rental apartments; and garbage pick-up.
- ii. Provide a two-lane pick-up/drop-off area, running the frontage of the building on Hills Plaza, located on the street level, set back under the second story of the building. This is similar to the pick-up drop off area of the 4620 N. Park Condominiums. This may provide adequate room for the quick stops of delivery vehicles such as Amazon, grocery deliveries, Fed Ex. etc., as well as resident and guest drop-offs and pick-ups.
- iii. Widen the new street to provide adequate safe paths for pedestrians, including the many elderly Village residents using canes, walkers, wheel chairs, as well as sufficient area for through vehicular traffic. Widening may require setting back the apartment building farther from the new road, or possibly providing more road width by setting back the first and second stories of the apartment building along the length of the building to provide a safe walking area and possibly space for restaurant seating.

As noted, the developers to date have made no changes to their plans that will assure satisfactory circulation, parking and loading. We therefore request, that the Board: (i) not approve the sketch plan at the November 18th hearing; or (ii) continue the hearing to give the developers time to make revisions. Whatever the Board's action, it must make expressly clear that there be a detailed plan for satisfactory circulation, loading and parking, which can result in changes to the siting, design and square footage of the sketch plan as presently proposed.

Sincerely,

FOR THE COUNCIL

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Melanie Rose White". The script is cursive and fluid.

Melanie Rose White  
Mayor

CC: Eliza Hisel-McCoy, Division Chief  
Down County Planning  
Montgomery County Planning Department  
[Eliza.Hisel-McCoy@Montgomeryplanning.org]

Grace Bogdan, Planning Coordinator  
Montgomery County Planning Department  
[Grace.Bogdan@montgomeryplanning.org]

David Forman, Chair  
Citizens Coordinating Committee on Friendship Heights  
[DavidForman01@gmail.com]

Julie Davis, Esq.  
Somerset House  
[JulieDavis1606@comcast.net]

**From:** [Nila Vehar](#)  
**To:** [MCP-Chair](#)  
**Cc:** [grace.bogdan@montgomerycounty.org](mailto:grace.bogdan@montgomerycounty.org); [elza.hisal-mccoy@montgomerycounty.org](mailto:elza.hisal-mccoy@montgomerycounty.org); [stephanie.dickel@montgomerycounty.org](mailto:stephanie.dickel@montgomerycounty.org)  
**Subject:** 5500 Wisconsin Avenue  
**Date:** Saturday, November 6, 2021 9:49:39 PM

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**[EXTERNAL EMAIL]** Exercise caution when opening attachments, clicking links, or responding.

Dear Chair Anderson,

I support the proposed plan to re-develop 5520-5500 Wisconsin Avenue in Friendship Heights. This block of Wisconsin Avenue is long overdue for an update and revitalization. The proposed project is forward looking. It will add value to the quality of life our community. The architectural design fits well with the Highland House and Willoughby properties. The plan includes moderately priced dwelling units, offering affordable housing, a welcome first for Friendship Heights.

I have lived in Friendship Heights since 1995. It's a great place to live, yet we are stagnant in planning to meet future needs. This is a plan that will address unmet needs in retail, eating establishments and housing. It is a property that will be attractive and welcoming. The Donohoe and Carr Companies have engaged with the public, listening to and addressing pros and cons. Their proposed plan incorporates many of the suggestions from Friendship Heights residents.

I urge the Planning Board to support this plan. It is a thorough and thoughtful one. It will make our wonderful community even more vibrant and diverse. In my view, it is short sighted to oppose this development, especially when our neighborhood is behind the curve. In encouraging new development that will refresh Friendship Heights.

Many of my neighbors are supportive of this plan. We are grateful to the Donohoe and Carr Companies for their prompt attention in responding to residents concerns and ideas.

Thank you for your consideration.

Nila Vehar

4620 North Park Avenue

1602 W

Chevy Chase, MD 20815

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[nilavehar@gmail.com](mailto:nilavehar@gmail.com)

Sent from my iPad



**From:** [Julian Mansfield](#)  
**To:** [Anderson, Casey](#); [casey.anderson@montgomerycountyp planning.org](mailto:casey.anderson@montgomerycountyp planning.org); MCP-Chair  
**Cc:** [Norman Knopf](#); [Michael Mezey](#); [Robert Wilkoff](#)  
**Subject:** 5500 Wisconsin Ave/Public Hearing  
**Date:** Friday, November 12, 2021 3:57:41 PM

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**[EXTERNAL EMAIL]** Exercise caution when opening attachments, clicking links, or responding.

**Re: 5500 Wisconsin Avenue Sketch Plan: Hearing November 18th**

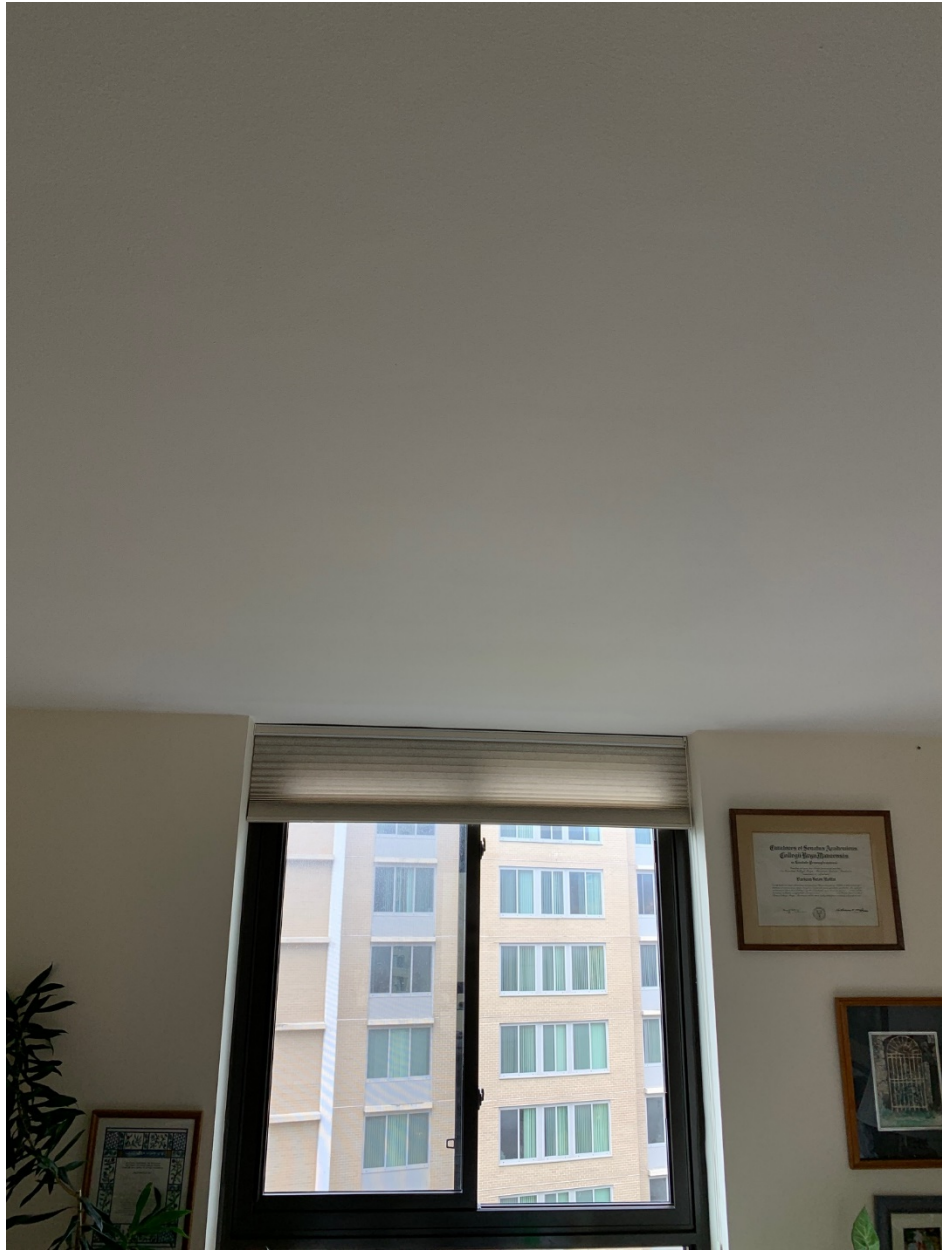
Dear Mr. Anderson:

Per authorization by the Friendship Heights Village Council, I am attaching to this email a photo for submission in the record of the above-referenced matter.

This photo was taken by me on November 12, 2021. It is the view from a bedroom window in 4620 North Park Avenue condominiums, 11th floor, looking directly across North Park Avenue into the former Irene at 4701 Willard Avenue (now called Willard Towers). The two buildings are on opposite sides of North Park Avenue and confront each other. The distance between the buildings was 100 ft as measured physically by a measuring tape. The photo was taken from 10 feet into the bedroom. Therefore, the photo of Willard Towers is at a distance of 110 feet. The photo was taken on my cell phone at the default setting, i.e., no enlargement or other alteration. The staff report for the 5500 Wisconsin project, on page 17, notes the apartments in the proposed building would be 80 feet from the confronting Highland House apartment building for the first 6 floors, and 110 feet for the next 12 floors.

Thank you,

Julian Mansfield  
Village Manager  
Village of Friendship Heights



**From:** [David Forman](#)  
**To:** [MCP-Chair](#)  
**Cc:** [Hisel-McCoy, Elza](#)  
**Subject:** Letter from CCCFH regarding 5500 Wisconsin Avenue  
**Date:** Saturday, November 13, 2021 2:40:20 PM  
**Attachments:** [5550 Wisconsin Ave. CCCFH letter to Planning Board.pdf](#)

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**[EXTERNAL EMAIL]** Exercise caution when opening attachments, clicking links, or responding.

David S. Forman  
Chair, Citizens Coordinating Committee on Friendship Heights  
Bethesda, MD 20816  
cell: (202) 294-1426

# **Citizens Coordinating Committee on Friendship Heights**

**October 31, 2021**

**TO: Casey Anderson, Chair and Members of the Planning Board  
Elza Hisel- McCoy, Chief Down County Planning, Grace Bogdan, Planning  
Coordinator**

**FROM: Citizens Coordinating Committee on Friendship Heights, Inc.**

**DATE: October 31, 2021**

**RE: OPPOSITION TO 5500 WISCONSIN AVE. SKETCH PLAN**

The Citizens Coordinating Committee on Friendship Heights, Inc. ("CCCFH") is a civic association comprised of organizations representing 21 communities in and around the Friendship Heights area. The developers of 5500 Wisc. Ave. made a presentation to CCCFH at CCCFH's request. Thereafter, at its October 20, 2021 meeting, the sketch plan was discussed and CCCFH VOTED UNANIMOUSLY TO OPPOSE THE SKETCH PLAN AS CURRENTLY PROPOSED. THE OPPOSITION IS BASED ON THREE REASONS:

- I. The plan does not substantially conform with the recommendations of the sector plan, required by Sec. 59.7.3.3 E.2;**
- II. The plan does not achieve compatible relationships with existing nearby development, required by Sec. 59.7.3.3 E. 5;**
- III. The plan does not provide satisfactory vehicular, pedestrian, bicycle circulation, parking and loading, required by Sec. 59.7.3.3 E.6;**

## **I. Non-conformity with Sector Plan**

CCCFH has played a major role in the writing and adoption the Friendship Heights Sector Plans. CCCFH was founded in the early 1970's in response to the County's announcement that it would prepare a Sector Plan for Friendship Heights and apply new zones that were being drafted (CBD zones). CCCFH representatives comprised 7 of the 11 Advisory Committee Members working with Planning Board staff to formulate the plan, adopted in 1974. Similarly, when the 1974 plan was updated and adopted in 1998, the current plan, CCCFH representatives constituted 10 of the 16 members of the Advisory Committee. This extensive involvement of CCCFH in formulating the plans, as well as the benefits CCCFH communities receive from the plans, helps explain the concern of CCCFH and its member communities at the possibility of approval of a sketch plan which is inconsistent with the provisions and purpose of the Sector Plans.

**A.** Prior to the adoption of the 1974 Sector Plan, the Village of Friendship Heights had been extensively developed with very tall and dense buildings permitted under the then code, e.g. the (former) Irene (16 stories, FAR 6.6), Willoughby (20 stories, FAR 8.29), Barlow Bldg. (14 stories, FAR 5.10), and Chevy Chase Bldg, (14 stories, FAR 5.12). These buildings created a "barricade" along the Willard Ave. and Wisconsin Ave. boundaries of the Village. Such large buildings resulted in the "canyonization" of interior streets. For example, N. Park Ave. has the 16 story Irene at the west end of the street, with the 16 story 4620 condo building lining the south side of N. Park Ave and across the street on the north side, 16 story N. Park apartments and 17 story Elizabeth. These tall



buildings lining the street provide limited open space, light and air, and block views from dwelling units, or afford views only into neighboring dwelling unit windows.

The 1974 Sector Plan found this level of development too great. The plan down zoned all parcels in the Village to a maximum height of 90ft and a maximum FAR of 2.0, applying the newly adopted CBD-1 (optional) zone. This down zoning was adopted by the County at the request of the Planning Board and its staff as well as residents.

**B.** The current 1998 Sector Plan reconfirms the CBD down zoning the of 90 ft height limit and 2.0 FAR. Pages 35-36 show all parcels in the Village continue to be zoned CBD-1. The 1998 plan notes (p-140):

"The 1974 Sector Plan recommended medium density commercial and office use of the parcels nearest to the Metro station and lower density primarily residential uses for the undeveloped properties further from the station ". (emphasis added).

In confirming the down zoning, the current plan notes (p. xxviii):

" In a densely built-up area like Friendship Heights, open space is critical to the quality of life."

A main principle of the current plan is to (p.31):

"[p]reserve and enhance the environment for residents of high-rise buildings....  
This principle can be achieved ...by limiting the height of new buildings close to high rise apartments to preserve views."

**C.** The proposed new buildings, located at the highest point of elevation of Friendship Heights, is 18 stories, plus two 10 ft roof top stories for mechanical equipment. It will protrude 213 ft above ground. Clearly this is not in conformity with the 90 ft height limit of the Sector Plan. Similarly, the FAR is effectively 5.14, and thus not in conformity with the Sector Plan's 2.0 limit. The 5.14 FAR is based upon the fact that the entire site is 79,012 sq. ft according to the SDAT records and the total development proposed is 406,563 sq.ft. The developer claims FAR is 3.42 by including in the size of the site about 40,400 sq ft of land previously dedicated for public roads. However, the actual visual effect of the development will be an FAR of 5.14.

The sketch plan not only fails to be in conformity with the Sector Plan's height and FAR limits, but its approval eviscerates the Sector Plan's very purpose - to down zone so as not to permit the continuation of the scale of development in height and FAR that occurred prior to the Sector Plan, which created a wall along the Village's boundary and resulted in "canyonization" of interior streets. The new building completes the barricading wall effect along Wisconsin Ave by filling in the one remaining relatively open space and "canyonizing" the first block of S. Park Ave. by placing effectively a 21-story building across the street from the 15 story Highland House, blocking, light, air, and views from dwelling units.

**D.** CCCFH is aware that since the adoption of the Sector Plan, a new zoning code was enacted. The new code zone, for this site and all other sites in the Village, retains the 90 ft height limit but allows greater height as long as the average height for the entire development does not exceed 90 ft. Of course, this does not, nor could it, override the Sector Plan recommendations and its purpose—to prevent buildings in excess of the 90 ft in height. Nor does the existence of averaging mean that a developer is entitled to average as a matter of right and ignore other considerations such as the Sector Plan limitations, compatibility, etc. We are also aware of zoning code provisions which permit

increased height over Sector Plan recommendations for a greater percentage of MPDU's. The developers have advised that for their plan they are allowed an increase of 12 ft. Thus the maximum height permitted is 90 ft plus 12 ft or a total of 102 ft- not 231ft. [We note with great concern that the developers have refused to provide sufficient specifications of their plan which would permit the community as well as the Planning Board and its staff- to verify the developers' conclusions re height averaging.]

In adopting the new zoning code in 2014, it was represented that the names of the zones were being changed but not their substance. Nevertheless, the new zone replacing the CBD-1 zone provided for an FAR of 3.0 although the CBD-1 zone replaced had an FAR of 2.0. We believe this was error which occurred due to the fact that the CBD-1 zone could have a 3.0 FAR under specified and extraordinary conditions but those conditions were not present in the Village. In any event, even assuming the correctness of a 3.0 FAR, rather than FAR of 2.0, does not eliminate the Sector Plan requirement of a 2.0 FAR, nor eliminate the requirement of compatibility with existing development, nor confer upon a developer a greater FAR as a matter of right. A zoning code provision which does override the Sector Plan FAR limit is the allowance of greater FAR for an increased percentage of MPDU's. The developer has taken advantage of this by providing more MPDU's which it asserts entitles the project to an additional 0.42 FAR. Thus, the permitted FAR is 3.42. However, as noted above, the actual effective FAR is 5.14 when one considers the existing square footage of the site rather than the land previously dedicated for, and now part of adjacent roads.

## **II. Not compatible with existing nearby development**

**A.** The building is 213ft tall, the equivalent of 21 stories, on the highest elevation in Friendship Heights. It will stick out above the line of buildings along the west side of Wisconsin Ave. like a sore thumb. It will be the tallest building on Wisconsin Ave south to the Potomac River. Adjacent to the north and downhill is the 12-story hotel, and then the 14 story Chevy Chase Medical Building. Adjacent to the south is the 15 story Highland House, then downhill the 14 story Barlow Building, etc.

**B.** The building fills in the one remaining open space between high rise buildings along Wisconsin Ave., completing the walling effect sought to be avoided by the Sector Plan. This site currently provides open space, a view of the sky facing east as one walks along N. Park Ave, sits in the adjacent Village Humphrey Park, etc. A building of such great height will loom over the community. The shadows cast by the building are considerable but the exact locations are uncertain as the developers have refused to give to Friendship Heights Village the specifications used to conduct their shadow studies so that the studies can be verified.

**C.** The 18-21 story building on one side of S. Park facing the 15 story Highland House on the other side will "canyonize" the street, blocking light, air and block views. The blocking of views will not only occur with these two buildings but other nearby buildings, e.g., the Willoughby units fronting on Friendship Blvd facing east and Highland House West, situated on S. Park west of the Highland House.

## **III. Failure to provide satisfactory vehicular, pedestrian, bicycle circulation, parking and loading**

Friendship Heights Village, a member of CCCFH, has informed CCCFH that the current residential high-rise buildings in the Village have insufficient pick-up/drop-off areas for residents of the buildings, minimal to no parking spaces for visitors and guests, minimal to no parking for delivery and service vehicles, and insufficient, or no, bays for unloading moving trucks and no garbage truck pick-up areas. As a result, vehicles double park on the streets, park in "No Parking" areas, creating

unsafe conditions for vehicles and pedestrians. Further, the intersections of S. Park-Hills Plaza, S. Park -Wisconsin Ave, and Somerset-Wisconsin Ave, also currently experience congestion. with vehicles backed up to enter the intersections, frequently having to wait more than one traffic signal cycle to exit.

The developers represented that their proposed plan would not exacerbate these problems but would improve all conditions by the creation of a new street between the hotel and the apartment building. In addition, this street would provide a pleasant amenity with cafe/restaurant outdoor seating along the side of the new road. However, substantial portions of the street will necessarily be devoted to the entrance/exit areas for the apartment house garage, garbage truck pick-up, and moving truck unloading areas, and traffic lanes to accommodate two-way traffic. There appears to be little to no room for delivery/service vehicles, visitor/guest parking, adequate pick-up and drop-off, bicycle and pedestrian paths, etc. as well as any place for outdoor eating. Comments by various agencies to the DRC noted the inability of the proposed narrow new road to achieve all the purposes claimed. Even the developers responding comments indicate that revisions to the road concept are needed. The zoning code requires a finding for approval of a sketch plan that it provides satisfactory vehicular, bicycle, pedestrian circulation and parking and loading. Such a finding cannot be made. The developers argue that these problems can be worked out at the subsequent stage of site plan. But resolving these problems may NOT be able to be worked out, or at a minimum require a substantial change to the plan, such as a widening the proposed road by locating the apartment building further back from the new road, or reducing the massing of the building. The code, and good planning, require these issues to be addressed and resolved before sketch plan approval.

## **Conclusion**

CCCFH favors redevelopment of 5500 Wisc. Ave. However, any redevelopment must more closely adhere to the legal requirements of ( i ) substantial conformity to the Sector Plan; ( ii ) compatibility with existing development; and, ( iii ) satisfactory vehicular, bicycle, pedestrian circulation, parking and loading. Suggestions for changes have been made to the developers which could lead to CCCFH and its member communities to consider dropping their opposition. Changes have not been made. We urge the Planning Board staff and the Board to DENY approval of the sketch plan as presently drafted and require submittal of a revised plan.

Citizens Coordinating Committee on Friendship Heights  
David S. Forman, Chair

**Representing the Communities of Brookdale, Chevy Chase Village, Chevy Chase West, Drummond, Glen Echo Heights, Green Acres, Kenwood, Kenwood Condominium, Kenwood Forest II, Kenwood House Cooperative, Kenwood Place Condominium, Somerset, Somerset House Condominiums, Springfield, Sumner Village, Village of Friendship Heights, Westbard Mews, Westmoreland, Westwood Mews, and Wood Acres**

**From:** [Robert Wilkoff](#)  
**To:** [MCP-Chair](#)  
**Cc:** [Norman Knopf](#); [bob wilkoff](#)  
**Subject:** 5500 Wisconsin Ave Hearing Nov. 18 - DOCUMENT FOR WILKOFF TESTIMONY  
**Date:** Tuesday, November 16, 2021 2:24:43 PM  
**Attachments:** [CORRECTED WEST SECTION.pdf](#)

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**[EXTERNAL EMAIL]** Exercise caution when opening attachments, clicking links, or responding.

Dear Chair Anderson,

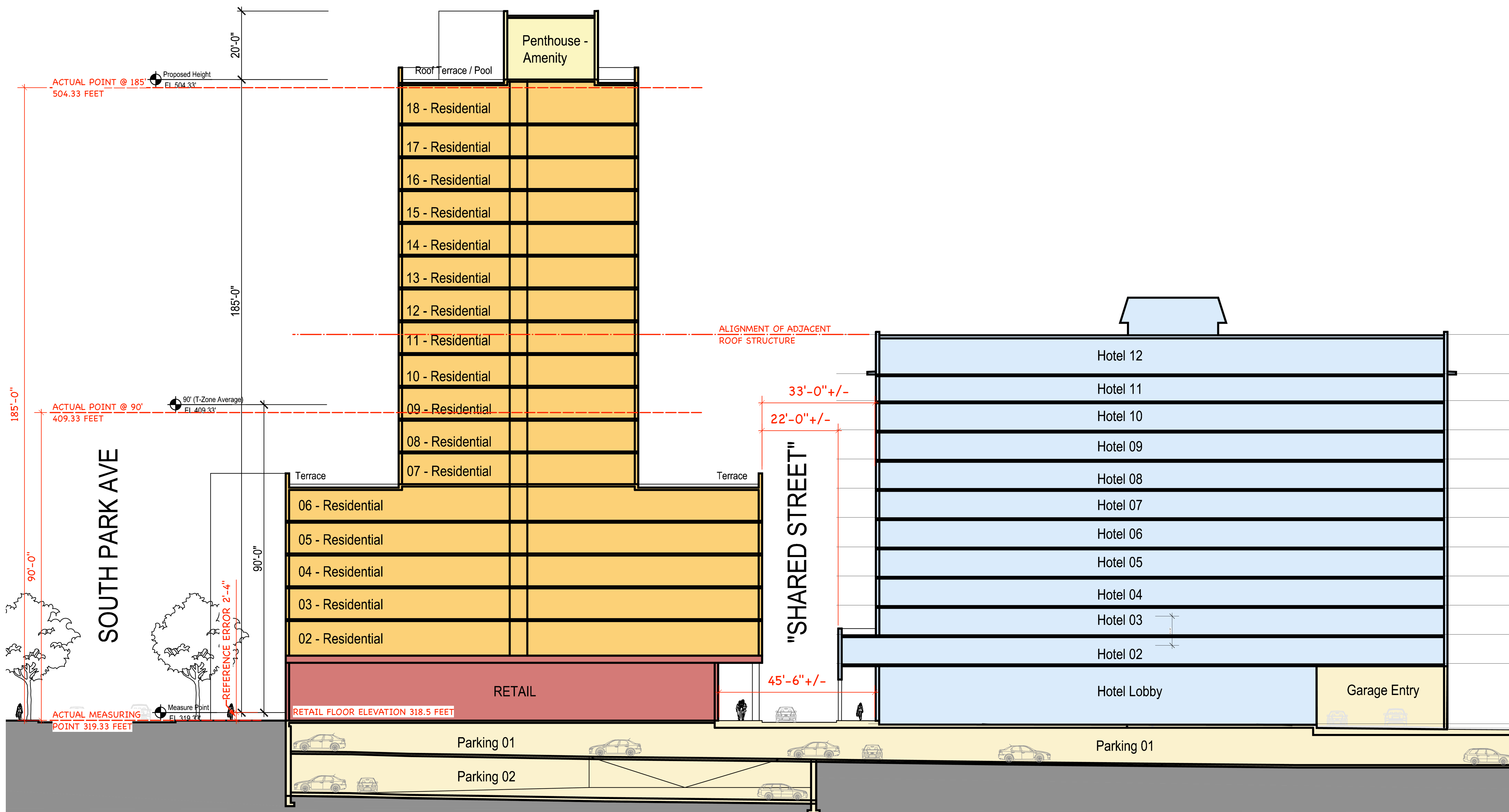
Please enter the attached document in the record of the above referenced hearing. I will be using this as part of my testimony .

Thank you.

Bob

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5500 WISCONSIN AVE

COURTYARD AT MARRIOTT

**From:** [Robert Wilkoff](#)  
**To:** [MCP-Chair](#)  
**Cc:** [Norman Knopf](#); [bob wilkoff](#)  
**Subject:** RE: 5500 Wisconsin Ave Hearing Nov. 18  
**Date:** Wednesday, November 17, 2021 11:47:01 AM  
**Attachments:** [NEW ROAD PLAN W DIMENSIONS.pdf](#)

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**[EXTERNAL EMAIL]** Exercise caution when opening attachments, clicking links, or responding.

Dear Chair Anderson,

Please enter the attached additional document in the record of the above referenced hearing. I will be using this as part of my testimony.

Thank you.

Bob

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THE HILLS PLAZA

