

**TESTIMONY BEFORE THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA COUNCIL  
COMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT  
(Councilmember Kwame R. Brown, Chair)**

**PUBLIC HEARING ON THE PROGRESS OF NEIGHBORHOOD ECONOMIC  
DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS ALONG GEORGIA AVENUE NW  
JUNE 29, 2007**

**BY D. KAMILI ANDERSON,  
PRESIDENT, BRIGHTWOOD COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION**

I am pleased to be here to testify today and thank you for this opportunity. I am encouraged that Councilmember Brown's Committee on Economic Development, and our new Councilwoman Muriel Bowser have taken up the mantle of going out into the affected communities of the Upper Georgia Avenue (UGA) corridor area—Shepherd Park, Colonial Village, Takoma DC, Manor Park, 16th Street Heights, and Brightwood—and soliciting our input directly, for the legislative branch of our local government. As president of the BCA, and before that as a member of the BCA's own Committee on Economic Development, I have participated for several years in efforts to address the blight and deterioration that has plagued the UGA corridor.

On behalf of the BCA, I currently serve as a member of the Advisory Committee to the UGA Great Streets Redevelopment Plan, which just today released its findings and recommendations for review, and I have been somewhat vocal and I believe helpful in my input to the discussions that led to that text, which I understand will be the foundation for advancing the comprehensive UGA development agenda. I want to commend the consultants and city employees who led that planning effort for their hard work and patience. I may not agree personally with all of the report's conclusions, but the report reflects the consensus of those of us who participated in the city's planning process. The task of synthesizing and making coherent a

broad array of opinion and data is a daunting one, and the result is the District has produced an important and useful resident-input-driven tool for channeling responsive and responsible development along Upper Georgia Avenue. I encourage the Council and the business community to scrutinize it carefully. The answers to your questions about what we citizens want for the UGA corridor are in there!

Given the availability of that document, I will not dwell tonight on specific recommendations. Plus, there are several meetings to discuss and review the Plan coming up very soon and I plan to attend. I do, however, want to mention a few key points that my fellow members and neighbors have raised on the subject of the Upper Georgia Avenue corridor while I have you two councilmembers together. I think these are especially salient for you to hear.

One of the most frequently raised issues I hear when members of the BCA and residents of Brightwood discuss development along the UGA corridor is the question of balance: Philosophically, between old and new, preservation and change, comfort and chaos; and at the “street” level, between longtime residents and newcomers, “big box” versus “mom-and-pop,” and between drivers and pedestrians. The gist of these oppositional forces can be boiled down to a single question for practical purposes, however: how much of Georgia Avenue’s future will involve business/retail growth and how much of it will entail residential growth?

We residents of Brightwood and members of the BCA generally disagree with the logic which states that new retail development in the UGA area must be accompanied by—and indeed, cannot be accomplished without—new residential development. This apparently seems to be the only model in play throughout much of the city “east of the park.” We in upper Northwest here need only point to the Silver Spring redevelopment example, which was spring-boarded primarily by the location of the Discovery office building to its then-deteriorating downtown

area and the government's willingness to help acquire abandoned and underutilized properties through purchase and condemnation. In that case, the influx of stores, shops, and restaurants led the way; residential development followed and is following still. We in Brightwood and elsewhere nearby look with a mix of envy, befuddlement, and dismay at the mass outflow of District residents, most from the nearby NW DC areas like Shepherd Park, Colonial Village, Takoma DC, Manor Park, and Brightwood, who currently flock to Silver Spring in droves to enjoy and take advantage of those goods and service offerings.

And we know that, but for an artificial border at Eastern Avenue, what happens there in Maryland could happen just a few hundred yards down the road on our side of the UGA corridor. We know that businesses saw markets there, and government bent over backwards to bring the two together. And because they then *acted* upon what they saw, they built—and the people came. Not “new” people, but underserved people, residents of the District of Columbia, who had been starving for quality retail within their reach.

So we in Brightwood and the BCA say to retail developers who have resisted building in our area: if you bring it, we *will* come! But work with the District to bring us the same services and conveniences you bring to neighborhoods where other established development projects have taken place such as Wisconsin-Tenleytown and Chevy Chase, Connecticut Avenue-Woodley Park and more recently Downtown-7th Street have been built—namely, parking—both under- and above- ground—and attractive streetscaping and lighting, and community gathering spots (like Silver Spring's “Turf”) and historical points of interest, and adequate policing so that shoppers and residents don't feel like easy prey for opportunistic criminal elements. And bring to our area particularly the same respect and regard you have for our dollars as you have for others'. They are just as green.

If Kmart and Home Depot can cleverly build a big-box store in midtown Manhattan in New York City, and if Costco can put an innovatively configured warehouse store in inner-city downtown Vancouver, British Columbia, then we residents of Brightwood and members of the BCA just plain do not believe that other such creative, large-scale projects can't be done in our area while simultaneously minimizing disruption and displacement!

Retail establishments and developers that refuse to implement such plans along a corridor such as ours that is just ripe for development don't lack financial resources, they lack *will* and *vision*! And they, and the city for not being more aggressive in courting them and problem-solving issues of development with residents, are simply letting our dollars walk out the door, down the road, from the District to elsewhere.

This is not to say that Brightwooders and members of the BCA are opposed to new residential development on UGA. We realize that when municipal governments know they must address residents' concerns in business corridors, when local politicians know that there are votes involved when they interface with retail developers, adding more citizens—new and relocated—to the overall UGA corridor development scheme makes good sense. But questions of affordability loom large in this equation. A look at the demographics of the UGA surrounding areas above Petworth reveal a large percentage of stable, middle- to high-income, middle-aged home-owning residents—these citizens represent that group of “built-in” buyers and store-starved shoppers I alluded to earlier. These residents are not looking for additional or new housing; they are here, they are generally happy they live here (lack of retail notwithstanding), and they will most likely stay in the area for years to come. But there are other residents: renters, young people, and working-class people with families—these Brightwood, Manor Park, and Takoma DC residents have housing needs that the current mix of apartments and single-family

homes in our area will not support. If we are going to bring housing to the UGA corridor, opportunities to keep these taxpayers contributing to the District's coffers are critical. So we of the BCA support a range of mixed-income residential development that is within the financial grasp of the citizens who are here.

I am pleased to be here especially because I am a stakeholder. Georgia Avenue is part of my life and I, living as I do just one block from that soon-to-be-great-again throughway, am part of it. Though its failings and shortcomings confront me everyday, I see the bright face of promise on the horizon. I see new buses and construction. I hear rumors of change and catch glimpses of plans. Like many other District residents, I am impatient and frustrated and skeptical, and I take that mixture of emotions and viewpoint to the voting booth with me. But I want to help—and be heard, so thank you for allowing me to speak tonight.

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