



ADVISORY NEIGHBORHOOD COMMISSION 3E

TENLEYTOWN AMERICAN UNIVERSITY PARK FRIENDSHIP HEIGHTS

WAKEFIELD CHEVY CHASE FORT GAINES

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ANC 3E Testimony in support of B25-0149

Good Afternoon Councilmember McDuffie and members of the Committee on Business and Economic Development.

My name is Tom Quinn and I am an Advisory Neighborhood Commissioner representing single member district 3E04, testifying today on behalf of ANC 3E in support of bill 25-0149 which would authorize the establishment of the Friendship Heights Business Improvement District.

In 2015 Commissioners from ANC 3E were actively engaged in the creation of the Tenleytown Main Street which was initially funded in the fiscal year 2016 budget. The Tenleytown Main Street organization supports businesses along Wisconsin Avenue from Van Ness Street to Fessenden Street.

In the intervening 6 years the Tenleytown Main Street organization has successfully organized and promoted neighborhood businesses, planned numerous successful neighborhood events, catalyzed streetscape improvements and neighborhood clean-ups and organized citizen committees.

Unfortunately during the same period the Friendship Heights commercial district on both the DC and Maryland side of Western Avenue has seen numerous businesses close which has resulted in a high retail vacancy rate and plans to re-develop many of the retail properties into mixed use projects with a fraction of the previous retail square footage but with a significant increase in residential units.

Although there have long been citizens associations active on both sides of Western Avenue as well as a Montgomery County transportation planning group there has previously been no formal effort among commercial property owners and retailers to coordinate around planning, events and neighborhood promotions in Friendship Heights.

Friendship Heights is on the cusp of significant change. Ensuring that Friendship Heights thrives in today's competitive environment will take cross-jurisdictional collaboration, careful planning, and community building.

In 2020 the Urban Land Institute brought in leading urban planners for a Technical Assistance Panel that surveyed conditions in Friendship Heights and interviewed commercial land owners, business owners and neighborhood residents. Based on recommendations¹ from the ULI TAP

¹ <https://ulidigitalmarketing.blob.core.windows.net/ulidcnc/sites/15/2021/08/Friendship-Heights-TAP-Final.pdf>

panel, a group of major property owners from both DC and Maryland formed the Friendship Heights Alliance to coordinate place management, community building and revitalization along the Wisconsin Avenue corridor on both sides of Western Avenue.

Since 2022, supported by funding from major property owners, the Friendship Heights Alliance has conducted robust engagement with the ANC, residents, property owners and retailers. Based on that feedback, the Alliance initiated a range of placemaking and community building efforts, including new placemaking, pop-up galleries, markets, participation in DC's November 2022 Open Streets event, a historic exhibit on Reno City done in coordination with UDC and Jackson-Reed Students and a pop-up bookstore.

These efforts demonstrate the value of a cross jurisdictional, place focused approach to shepherding transformation and revitalization. As a result of this success, property owners on both sides of Western Avenue have come together with DC and Montgomery County government leaders to develop a sustainable funding model that will support this place focused work into the future.

There are currently at least 5 residential development projects with imminent construction start dates on both sides of Western Avenue and a WMATA led planning process to re-develop 2 additional properties totaling 10 acres on the DC side of the line and DDOT is also studying several opportunities to build bike infrastructure in Friendship Heights in addition to the WMATA Better Bus planning effort² which is proposing several improvements to bus service in the neighborhood.

ANC 3E enthusiastically supports the formation of the Friendship Heights Business Improvement District. The BID builds on two years community engagement and programming that has garnered broad support from businesses, property owners and residents.

ANC 3E approved this testimony at its meeting on May 11, 2023, which was properly noticed and at which a quorum was present. The resolution was approved by a vote of 0-0-0. Commissioners Jonathan Bender, Matthew Cohen, Jeffrey Denny, Ali Gianinno Rohin Ghosh, Amy Hall and Tom Quinn were present.

Thank you for your time today.

² <https://www.wmata.com/initiatives/plans/Better-Bus/index.cfm>