

PUBLIC COMMENT ON TAKOMA JUNCTION

2018 DATE	NAME	WARD*	COMMENT
5/23	Cathy Kelly	3	I am against the size of the current proposal plan for the Takoma Junction. There are considerations and ramifications that haven't been addressed or thought through well enough. Number one is traffic volume that is already passed capacity at that intersection. I live on Boyd Avenue at Jackson Ave. Cut-through traffic is already very heavy/bad all day long due to the malfunctioning intersection at Carroll Ave and Rt 410, coupled with the closing of Manor Circle several years ago. I avoid that dysfunctional intersection myself because I know how excruciating long the light cycles are. Unfortunately, angry, impatient commuters are the norm on my street every day. I've had two vehicles parked in my own driveway that were totaled by speeding cut-through drivers. I'm actually lucky to be alive after the second incident. Something NEEDS to be done to alleviate traffic backups there at the source of the problem not add to it - like I know the new construction plan will. Its too much development for the lot and the location.

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5/24	Roger Schlegel	3	<p>Dear Mayor Stewart and Councilmembers Kovar, Dyballa, Kostiuk, Seamens, Smith, and Searcy,</p> <p>At last night’s Council work session, I appreciated the time you took to discuss height considerations and possible adjustments to the height of NDC’s proposed structure. In particular, I was glad to hear Councilmember Kovar’s observations about the actual and average heights of structures in Old Town and in Takoma Junction. The discussion prompted me to share these brief comments which I hope you find helpful:</p> <p>1. Historic District context: My understanding from talking with Lorraine Pearsall of Historic Takoma is that the context of the historic district at Takoma Junction calls for a building height that is closer to 30 feet in order to be compatible with the area. I’ve talked this issue over with Lorraine many times dating back to my time on the Task Force (of which she was a member). She stresses that the county Historic Preservation Commission (HPC), rather than height limits set in the zoning code, will be the ultimate arbiter on this height question because of the historic district status. As you negotiate with NDC about the building height, I think it makes sense to work with the assumption that the HPC will reject a structure that is much higher than 30 feet and will send it back for redesign.</p> <p>To emphasize, here and elsewhere, I am talking about the apparent height of the building, which is not the height of the roof surface, but the height of the parapet. The roof surface could be set at 34 feet, but if the parapet extends to 38, 40, or 42 feet, the visual impact is the same as if the roof were that height. Comparisons can be made between the proposed building’s average height, or the elevator tower height, and the heights of specific landmark structures such as the Fire Station (with its clock tower) or the Seventh Day Adventist Church in Old Town. These comparisons are irrelevant to the height considerations for a new commercial building. It is customary for notable public buildings (such as a fire station) to reach higher in order to stand out from other structures. The same has long been true for houses of worship, as we all know. So in evaluating the typical height of buildings in Old Town or in the Junction, the HPC is not going to give much weight to the Fire Station tower or the Adventist Church in its calculations. Those structures obviously were built purposely to stand out in the landscape rather than to set a height standard to which other buildings should aspire.</p> <p>2. How high does a retail ceiling need to be? I have heard Mr. Washington emphasize that in today’s market, retain tenants expect ceiling heights of 16 to 18 feet. While this may be the case in some commercial districts, i don’t think that it makes sense to say that a retail tenant must have a ceiling that high to be successful. In this, I agree with what Councilmember Kovar pointed out in his comments. Consider how wildly popular the H Street or U Street corridors are in the District. These corridors are filled with thriving retail businesses that are working with ceiling heights typical for the early twentieth century, as is the case with other spaces at the Junction. It makes sense to aim for what our building codes identify as the minimum required height for firstfloor retail/restaurant and second-floor office space.</p> <p>3. Visual impact for the commercial district: I urge you to stand at the Junction and take a couple of minutes to imagine the visual impact of the proposed building. The lowest portion, closest to the Co-op, would rise to 34 feet -- 15 feet higher than the Co-op building. After maintaining that 34-foot height for just a short distance (fifteen feet), the building would transition to a minimum 38-foot height, with periodic extensions to 40 feet and a parapet curving up to 42 feet in height. The simplest way to visualize this height is to stand in front of Spring Mill Bakery and look across the intersection. Take an 8 x 11.5 sheet of paper. Fold it in half lengthwise, turn it sideways, and hold it in front of you until it matches the height of the Co-op (19-20 feet). Then, holding the paper at the same distance, unfold it so that it now reaches up to twice the height. Imagine that height continuing down the block halfway through the current Takoma Auto Clinic property and punctuated by an elevator tower that is an additional 5 feet in height.</p> <p>By doing this exercise, you will be able to get a sense of how outlandish the height and mass of this building would be in the context of the Junction. It would have the same impact as we get when people in Takoma Park tear down houses outside of the Historic District and put up structures twice as tall as anything around them. Except this would be taking place inside of the Historic District, so at no point in the future would any of the other buildings “catch up” in height and even out the stark visual imbalance. This is why I believe Lorraine when she says that the HPC won’t approve something anywhere near the height that NDC proposes.</p>

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5/24	Roger Schlegel (cont'd)		<p>4. Shadows: It's also important to think about shadows here, in terms of aesthetics as well as safety. NDC/Streetsense presented renderings that show the front of the proposed building bathed in sunlight, but that will not be the case for much of the day, for much of the year. It might seem insignificant to be quibbling about a difference of 10 feet in height, but at our latitude, during the fall, winter, and spring, that additional 10 feet would add 20 or 30 feet to the building's shadow length during the earlier morning and later afternoon hours. This not only would contribute to a feeling of gloom but would also, in my opinion, create safety hazards. Many automobile collisions and collisions with bicyclists and pedestrians occur when there is a sharp contrast between the brightness of the sky and the darkness of the roadway. Drivers' pupils constrict as they face into the bright afternoon or morning sky, which makes it harder for them to spot objects (or people) closer to the ground level and in shadowed areas. Given that the building's north-facing orientation, these considerations suggest that every foot that can be "shaved off" the building design would have significant benefits.</p> <p>5. Connection between height and building envelope: From an environmental standpoint, a higher building also means a larger building envelope. For a structure with a footprint of 25,000 square feet, every additional foot of interior ceiling height adds close to 25,000 cubic feet of airspace that needs to be heated and cooled. That takes a lot of energy. When Councilmember Dyballa (I believe) raised this point in last week's work session, Mr. Washington responded that the larger windows made possible by higher ceilings provide more natural lighting, and that the resulting lower costs for electrical lighting offset any higher energy demands associated with the higher ceilings. I think it's safe to say that Mr. Washington's reasoning is incorrect. With new construction now using LED lighting, with much of the interior space located far from any windows, with the greater heat loss associated with larger windows, and with the common sense knowledge that heating and cooling use far more energy than lighting, I think we all have to agree that higher ceilings have a significant net environmental cost.</p> <p>6. Visual impact for the residential neighborhood in the rear: As you think about building height, please take a moment to walk around the back of the site along Columbia Avenue to consider the visual impact of the proposed structure. The structure's footprint would reach beyond the back corner of the Co-op by several feet and would reach downward to account for the steep slope on that part of the property. As a result, that back corner of the building would rise vertically 55 or even 60 feet at a location that is just a few steps from Columbia Avenue. Obviously, taking 7 or 10 feet off the back of that structure -- assuming it can't be set back further -- would really help the aesthetic impact in the rear.</p> <p>7. Elevator tower location: A number of you expressed concerns about the height of the elevator tower because of its visual impact as viewed from the street, but at the same time you recognized the dilemma that the tower is necessary if there is to be elevator access to the rooftop. The obvious solution is to relocate the elevator tower farther back from the roadway, perhaps midway between the front and rear of the building. The Alternative Plan #2 that was shared with you does just that. Along with incorporating a generous public plaza between the new building and the Co-op, it locates the elevator about fifty feet back from the roadway and much closer to the Co-op, and to the Grant Avenue crosswalk. I hope you have had a chance to take a look at that Alternative Plan #2 because it really responds thoughtfully to the design challenges with the site -- not only in terms of the elevator location but also in terms of public space, driveway location, and deliveries and trash handling.</p>
5/24	Roger Schlegel (cont'd)		<p>8. Parking garage ceiling height: Last but not least, please be sure to think about the ceiling height in the parking garage. I haven't seen any drawings that provide this measurement, but it seems very important that the City insist that this garage be built with a 10-foot ceiling height. Even though the garage ceiling height has no impact on the above-ground building height, it's still really important. Why? Over the lifespan of this building, we should be expecting that Takoma Park and our metropolitan area will make the necessary transition away from a predominantly car-based economy. As that happens (and sooner rather than later, we hope!), we will want to adapt portions of the underground area for other uses. It will be necessary to have at least a 10-foot ceiling in order for that space to have the flexibility to serve different functions over time. If all goes well and we keep responding assertively to the threat of climate change, we certainly don't want to end up with an underused "white elephant" parking garage in just ten or fifteen years. Please insist on a 10-foot garage ceiling height. To conclude, the common thread in these comments is the importance of ensuring that any development at the Junction is highly sensitive and responsive to the context as well as the present and future needs. Thank you again for engaging in thoughtful and open discussion about the building-height questions. I hope these ideas are helpful, and I'd be happy to talk with you further in person, over the phone, or via email.</p>

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5/24	Mimi Ikle-khalsa	2	First of all thanks to each of you for the time you have, are , and will spend on this project. I am not strongly invested in if there's much development at the junction or what shape or size it takes (as long as it seems to fit our diverse community, values and current cityscape). What is important to me is that the Coop have the space and accommodations to thrive. (Addressing traffic issues along the way and having great public space is a bonus). Please consider supporting me and others like me who based their home purchase on having the coop in walking distance and I'll support the development plan in a variety of forms. Thanks and have a great day!
5/24	Elizabeth Bakacs	5	I am pro-development of The Junction space in the heart of Takoma. However, the most recent Site Plan by NDC misses the mark on a number of fronts. While development of this space is desirable, it needs to be a solution that is first functional, and second informed by the context of the surroundings and the uniqueness of TKPK. While I am not a member of the co-op, I recognize that the co-op is unique in its proposition, character, and value it adds to our city, and this should be taken into consideration. I look forward to the council coming to a consensus on a REVISED development that addresses the points put forth in the city's October resolution request and addresses the traffic and operational needs.
5/25	Roland Weiss	3	My wife and I are concerned about the recent letter to the City from many current business owners in the Junction which expressed concerns about the proposed Junction site plan. (We understand that other Junction businesses didn't sign the letter and are supportive of the development.) We've lived in the Junction since 1984. We're regular customers of many of these businesses, some, like the Takoma Park Animal Clinic, for more than 20 years. It's also been very exciting to see new businesses like Spring Mill and the new restaurant locate in the Junction. We think the development should aim to compliment and support these businesses. The city should meet with the businesses that expressed concerns to better understand their issues and work with NDC to ameliorate their concerns as much as possible. It's in everyone's interest, including NDC's, for all of the Junction businesses to thrive.

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5/26	Debra Prybyla	3	<p>I strongly oppose the current plan for development at Takoma Junction. It is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * much too big, * isn't being considered in the context of other existing and possible development in Takoma Park, * will lead to traffic gridlock (far beyond what we are already experiencing with the current level of revitalization that has occurred at the Junction), * provides insufficient parking for employees and customers which will result in many people parking along nearby streets, * doesn't serve low-income community members and over-serves high-income residents, * lacks sufficient public space, * doesn't reflect community and local business sentiments, * isn't consistent with community visioning, * threatens the Coop (a community treasure used by a wide range of people from near and far), * and more. <p>I think the Junction is already sufficiently developed and that the parking and open space provided by that lot are already much-needed for current parking, deliveries, and trash management needs of existing businesses..as well as for periodic community events (I remember how fun it was years ago when the Coop showed movies outside on the wall of the building on summer evenings and people brought lawn chairs and sat in the parking lot!). Why do we need more development there? When the environmental impact of proposed federal actions are considered under the National Environmental Policy Act, there's a requirement to consider the "no action" alternative along with other alternatives. I think that should be done in this case as well and I believe it would be the alternative with the greatest community benefit, weighed against the costs. Yes, there could be some aesthetic improvements and perhaps some additional green space, but not major development. Stormwater management is a particular concern of mine. The current impermeable parking lot generates a lot of polluted stormwater runoff each time it rains. The proposed development would have that same effect. I have heard talk of using a green roof to manage that runoff, and using "green infrastructure" such as a green roof has many benefits, but green roofs tend to be very expensive. Who would pay that cost? Managing the runoff from a much-smaller development with less expensive green infrastructure (rain gardens, bioswales, trees) would be a better approach. I encourage the Council to step back and spend some time making very clear what its criteria are for Takoma Junction. And then evaluate the possible alternatives, including a "no action" alternative, in terms of how well they meet those criteria. Research studies, polling and other methods may be needed in order to determine how well the alternatives meet or don't meet the criteria.</p> <p>Thank you for considering my comments.</p>

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5/26	Sarah Fitzpatrick	NR	<p>While I've been increasingly troubled by the City's review process, I'm somewhat encouraged by what I've heard tonight about the upcoming mediation, and some of the comments from the council. I look forward to a thorough and fair process. It is not appropriate to be drafting a resolution before the mediation completes, and when so many issues remain unresolved and essential steps of the process have not been completed. Last week's session was restricted to discussion of what were called "trade-offs", which gave the impression that the Council is ready to move forward with only minimal changes to the plan. These restrictions on the discussion made it difficult for council members to bring up other crucial concerns, which I'm glad they have been able to do tonight. We cannot proceed while the traffic studies have not been finalized, which we all know won't happen until SHA completes its most recent light timing adjustments. Please keep us apprised when details come to light about selection of a mediator, the schedule of meetings, and recourse for the co-op if NDC doesn't uphold their promises. The City only just recently held its very first meeting with other Junction businesses to gauge their needs and reaction to the plan, and as you all know, a majority have serious concerns about its impact on their survival. Will firehouse volunteers, bus drivers, bike share riders and school crossing guard representatives have a chance to weigh in? We still do not have any to-scale drawings from NDC, or answers to the literally dozens of unresolved questions and issues intelligently and thoughtfully posed both by citizens, council members, and mayor. Finally, after stating publicly that the development would have no impact on racial equity, the City has now indicated that they may pull back completely from using this essential tool at all. There is so much in flux, yet the general mood is: full steam ahead. It's troubling to see that the developers have implied in both their words and actions that they are unwilling to make more than extremely minor changes to their design. This inflexibility, and the fact that their design ignores both the letter and spirit of last year's resolution, AND the findings of the task force, is not acceptable. Representatives have been dismissive and impatient in reaction to the legitimate questions and concerns asked by council members. You have both the right and the responsibility to assert yourself and advocate for the needs of your community, and you need to do it now more than ever. We all know that NDC will make few if any concessions after this plan goes to the County. Please don't let NDC silence you. Members of City staff and council must approach its discussion with each other and with the developer from a position of strength. NDC wants to work for Takoma Park, not the other way around. Further, I don't understand why City staff are increasingly giving explanations to council questions on behalf of NDC. Please, let them justify this plan for themselves! At this point the public doesn't even know the true positions of most of the council members. Do a majority favor or oppose the plan? Only Council member Smith has publicly stated that he will not vote for this plan. If there are others who plan to vote FOR it, now is the time to tell us, so that we can more honestly and transparently engage in conversation with you. The 3-minute public comments period is not allowing an opportunity for actual engagement. Some have suggested a town hall format, which I strongly support. Overall, I want to express that from where I sit, actions are speaking much louder than words, and the message is deeply troubling.</p>

*Ward is included if it was provided or can be looked up by address. NR denotes non-Takoma Park resident commenter. Question mark ? denotes not enough information provided. NA denotes that ward is not applicable