

PUBLIC COMMENT ON TAKOMA JUNCTION

2018 DATE	NAME	WARD*	COMMENT
5/24	Susan Katz Miller	3	<p>City Council Public Comment May 23 2018</p> <p>Must we choose between the current upscale commercial development plan, and an empty parking lot? We, the people, continue to reject that narrative as a false binary. We ask you, our City Council, to resist the argument that we cannot build anything unless it is “worthwhile” for this developer. This is our public land. If this developer refuses to include significant public space, or to build a commercial building with a reasonable footprint that fits our neighborhood, or to accommodate our only downtown grocery store, then that’s their choice. There are any number of alternative ways to fund transformative placemaking, through public/private partnerships, or state, county, nonprofit, or community grants, or collaboration with the Co-op. And we ask you, our City Council, to resist the idea that insisting on equity is some kind of last-minute red herring to derail the plan. In years of public comments, we have talked about the gentrifying effects of minimizing public space and maximizing upscale retail. What has changed recently, is that a groundswell of small businesses, and local residents most impacted by gentrification, are speaking up about their experiences. We have deep appreciation for the difficult and pioneering work you committed to, in applying a Racial Equity lens to all projects. And we appreciate the acknowledgement that the first and second attempts at an impact statement for this project were poor. Right now, we have an opportunity to do better. While we wait for traffic studies, and mediation, the Council can and must draw on community input to create a new Equity statement, not turn away from the task. This brings us to the fact that we had Work Sessions on traffic, on design, on sustainability. But despite the fact that the official Priority was labeled “Advance Economic Development,” we did not have any Work Session on economics or racial equity. We must schedule those Sessions. Finally, I ask how and when the City decided that the priority should be simply to “Advance Economic Development.” That was not the sole priority identified by the Junction Task Force, or set out in the RFP, Agreement, or Resolutions. In the years since this process began, the Junction has been revitalizing itself. The “empty parking lot” is now busy, thanks to Spring Mill, SeoulFood, Bikram Yoga, and the growing number of City events and festivals. All of these businesses and festivals rely on the free parking, and many of the events rely on the large open public space. Together, before it’s too late, we must reclaim and insist on this priority: “The very best use of public land for the public good.” Thank you.</p>
5/24	Jenny Apostol	3	<p>Thanks for implementing mediation between the Co-op and NDC, so they can figure out who is responsible for what, and how they will coordinate throughout the project. I hope it will provide a framework for positive communication and for accountability by all parties in the immediate and the long term. This will be very helpful. But I want to extend a note of caution. Mediation won’t solve the discontinuity alone. We, the city, are the clients, and I was glad to hear the Council’s reiteration of their role to continue to provide direction to the process in concert with City staff. As an observer who loves the Co-op (and not in the weeds of this process) my concern has been about what is motivating NDC to come to terms with your detailed resolutions and specific asks. I know you all bear the very real responsibility not only for the project but for the big picture goals for quality of life and habitability of the area. The site plan puzzled many of us for it’s apparent push back of certain City-led initiatives. I’m sure many of the arguments refer to budget, profitability, timing, all relevant to negotiation. It may not be the case, but NDC appears immune to pressure. For the Co-op--a consumer facing entity - the stakes to come to agreement are clear: they either remain in business or not. For the development companies: less clear. It seems like they’re going to get the gig no matter what. I suggest you add some back-stops into the process to ensure accountability as the project moves forward. If there’s a way to tie achievement of certain milestones to a pay schedule or a series of approvals, I would do that. I can fully understand why no one wants to delay green light by making it contingent upon a satisfactory mediation and agreement of terms, yet it is also inevitable that once construction gets going, TP will have less day to day control. I was also a bit puzzled about the discussion of access to the rooftop view. No - don’t trade out a portion of the green roof. Has a second story cafe/restaurant level been considered? I do think because of the unique location, providing a way to take advantage of the view in publicly accessible space would be an asset. That seems more achievable and less intrusive for us neighbors. I'm glad you all agree that the public space allotment is a minimum and that configurations will change as the design is refined. A landscaped barrier to traffic on the front-scape is key. I can only imagine how challenging it must be to work through this process in public. I’m always amazed at council meetings at both the range of concerned comments and the thoughtful dialogue during your work sessions. So, thank you again for the work.</p>

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5/24	Dara Orenstein	3	<p>At yesterday's Council meeting you asserted your commitment to "racial equity" with respect to the Junction, stressing that you intend to explore the problem further and to consult with residents in doing so. Indeed, you asked us to email you with ideas, and you, Kacy, flagged the possibility of convening a committee of residents to assist the Council. I write to endorse Kacy's proposal and to express my interest in participating. I feel passionately about the need for such a process, and I can contribute as a historian of political economy with expertise in cultural geography (e.g., Setha Low, whose name came up last night). However, I also cc: a number of people on this email in order to advocate that you make this effort instrumental, and not merely gestural. To that end I name two conditions for my own involvement:</p> <p>1) The committee needs to reflect the diversity of Takoma Park and to draw on an array of experiences and forms of knowledge. Accordingly, the City needs to provide a stipend to committee members, recognizing that they will need to miss work and/or to arrange childcare in order to attend meetings.</p> <p>2) The committee needs to be allotted adequate time to undertake this investigation, the goal of which is to help the Council understand and envision what exactly it would mean for the Junction to be true to that name -- a junction for all pathways through Takoma Park, a place where all residents feel invited to gather. Therefore, the Council needs to pass a resolution to postpone negotiations with NDC until the question of racial equity has been asked and answered. Apparently, Kate and Kacy, you think that NDC's plan will contribute to racial equity; I, like many, think it will do the precise opposite. And so my point here is simple. It's a matter of basic logic: before you sign off, before you take the next step towards "revitalization," you need to show that NDC's plan is as promising in these terms -- which should be your core terms -- as you hope and assume. You can't predict the future, but certainly you can offer more evidence for your outlook than you've supplied thus far.</p> <p>No doubt some will roll their eyes at what they're convinced is a delaying tactic. But that response is callous cynicism. I am encouraged and excited that calls for racial equity have risen to the fore, because I believe wholeheartedly that a framework centered on a reckoning with racial capitalism is the ONLY way to contemplate the future of the Junction (and of TKPK writ large). All planning needs to start with the imagery that Susan Huffman offered last night (video 2:47:13), and with the challenge that Denise Jones put to the Council last night (video 2:30:54) as well as last week (video 1:19:10). This is not an aspiration; it is a necessity. Anything short of it -- such as a vague promise to keep thinking and talking -- is mere window dressing for a development built for the few, not the many.</p>
5/24	Kathleen O' Toole and John Ruthrauff	3	<p>I am a constituent of yours and since I get home late from work, I won't disturb you with a phone call near 10PM. I've become increasingly dissatisfied with the push to adopt the City Manager's recommendations for the Takoma Junction Development, without thorough consideration of the reasonable alternative developed by architects to allow more viable space for the Takoma Park Coop that is so essential to our community. My husband and I have lived her a total of 45 years between us, and have seen recent developments threaten long time businesses that have made Takoma Park special. We urge you to support the "Community Vision for Takoma Junction" and stand up for development AND loyalty to long time businesses and economic diversity. We live on Westmoreland Avenue in your district and urge your support of a solution that can meet a number of needs.</p>
5/26	Jennifer Mathis	3	<p>I live in Ward 3 and I write to express opposition to the current development plan. While development of the lot is needed, it should be done right. Currently the plan for a very large retail space seems incongruous with everything that makes Takoma Park what it is and that drew most of its residents to the neighborhood. Please don't take steps to make us look more like Bethesda or similar neighborhoods; the whole reason we live here is that Takoma Park is different. In addition, I hope the Council will heed the concerns of the Food Coop. More than almost any other place in Takoma Park, the Coop is at the center of community life here. Development should be done without taking away their basic needs for loading/delivery space, space for waste storage, and parking. We shop at the Coop multiple times a week, and it is so important to us and so many of our neighbors. Please ensure that development of the space proceeds in a way that is consistent with Takoma Park's character, values, and one of its most important businesses. Once development proceeds, it will be impossible to walk back from a mistake, and we will all suffer if that happens.</p>

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5/30	Gina Gaspin	3	<p>I am a longtime (40-year) resident of Columbia Ave. and have been following the development process with interest. I have not weighed in before, but here are my thoughts and concerns. Back in 2016 when the RFP went out and three finalists were selected, I was excited about the ideas I heard. Prospective developers, especially NDC, talked about supporting (with possible room for expansion) the Co-op, having independent businesses and providing accessible outdoor open space. These were all aspects important to the City, based in part on the ideas coming out of the Charette process. Much has changed since then. One of the goals of the project was to revitalize and stabilize the Junction. The Junction has now organically begun to revitalize, with thriving businesses including the bakery/cafe and Korean restaurant. Now any City development should be mindful of the health of those independently run businesses. I fear that the size and cost of the NDC proposal would put those businesses at risk because of traffic and parking issues and likely rising rents as the Junction becomes more expensive. One of the requirements of the project was to support, rather than threaten, the Co-op. We all know the issues of parking, elevator placement, deliveries, trash, disruption during construction, etc. that remain unresolved. I hope the mediation process is useful, but let's not put in jeopardy an integral part of the fabric of Takoma Park. NDC's current plan is not tenable for the Co-op. The scale of the project has changed. 34,000 square feet and two stories has become over 50,000 square feet with a height (in places) of over 40 feet. It's just too big, both for the site and for the neighborhood. There is no reason for the City to accept a proposal that so differs from NDC's original one. The project was to encourage alternate means of transportation. However, both the shared bikes and the bus stop will be gone. Another goal was expansion of community use of public space The public space carved out by NDC is paltry. At the Council meeting on May 23, several council members mentioned using B.Y. Morrison Park as the public space. That bit of land is not used because it's uninviting and off-putting. The public space needs to be central, of decent size, and attractive and welcoming We need to insist that NDC provide the space they initially promised. I haven't even mentioned traffic, because the State Highways traffic study and analysis are not yet available, but the preliminary study clearly showed problems that need serious mitigation. I am concerned about the nature of the tenants. Who will be able to afford the rents? Independent businesses that fit with the character of Takoma Park?. We are a diverse, eclectic and idiosyncratic community, and a major development must reflect that..If the rents are so high that only large chains or high-end ventures can thrive, that development doesn't belong in the Junction. And there are racial equity considerations. I was particularly proud to be a Takoma Park resident when I learned of the Council's prioritizing the furthering of racial equity. This development is your first major opportunity to look through that lens. Let Takoma Park be a leader here and continue to make me proud. Please don't make any decisions on development until you have educated yourselves and are ready to apply a racial equity framework. Thank you for reading.</p>
5/30	Tory Paide	?	<p>I have had a chance to review the information about the Junction development and want to make it clear that I, as business owner and junction property owner, support the project as it is currently proposed. I am fully confident that the project will help support this part of the city - both the current businesses as well as residents who want more dining and shopping options. The one point the opposing side makes with regards to the gentrification issue because of rent prices I have to comment on. Rent in Takoma has been exorbitant for the past 8-10 years. I got in in 2007 for a fraction of what rent is now - there is no way I could start a similar services business as The Still Point in TKPK now. And now I'm a proud landlord (thanks to years of help and support from OTBA and others in the community) and don't have to worry about increasing rent prices. What is remarkable about this community is that it continues to attract well-run, successful small businesses and I trust that will continue. The more the merrier to add to our already vibrant community. Change is tough and I can imagine your jobs aren't easy right now. Thanks for your commitment to TKPK!</p>

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2018 DATE	NAME	WARD*	COMMENT
5/31	Dennis Huffman	3	<p>I am among the significant number of Takoma Park residents who are struggling to come to terms with what feels like the slow-motion death of a loved one. While the patient’s demise has not been certified, the City Council will be voting on it very soon. No. I am not taking about a piece of asphalt between the fire house and the Co-op – that’s just a symptom. The imminent death I am talking about is Sam Abbott’s vision for a city committed to building racial and economic equity. Perhaps it would be helpful to view this through the lens of the five stages of grief. Many of us have been in a long period of denial (the first stage). The council seems still to be denying its role in the problem, acting as though it is duty bound simply to cut the City’s losses and ratify the inevitable. In the community, a common refrain (and I’ve said it myself) is that we are just now realizing how perilous things are. Many of us were asleep, wanting to believe that our leaders were wise and progressive people who would always act in our best interest. Which brings me to anger. There has been a lot of anger expressed in a lot of meetings over the past few months. Anger at the breach of trust. Anger at the privatization of public land. Anger at the Council’s blind faith in the developers. And anger at Council’s stone-faced deafness in hearing after hearing. Council appears to be angry that we’re angry. Bargaining, the third stage in the grieving process, is generally done with God, but in this case, it’s being done with the developers, who seem to be held up as somehow god-like by the council and City staff. Rather than having big conversations, early on, about the beliefs and values of the people of Takoma Park, and how they might be reflected in the use of public land, the developer was left to negotiate with the Co-op about things like the loading dock. And it turns out this “god” doesn’t heed the prayers of nonbelievers – the future of the Co-op is clearly threatened by this project. But even those who may be unmoved by the plight of the Co-op are expressing alarm at the council’s unwillingness to stand up for its own criteria. The city seems not to realize that it holds the upper hand in any negotiations with the developers. Back to Sam Abbott’s vision. Some may question how one development project can harm “equity,” but the problem with that question is that it presumes somehow that equity exists. Equity does not exist. It is equity itself that must be developed – built, if you will. And the proposed project is utterly indifferent to equity. This is all, of course, quite depressing (stage 4). The City needs the development to make money to hire staff to plan more development to make more money to hire more staff. It’s the inevitable way of the world. Some are already sighing deeply and slipping into acceptance (stage 5). “Traffic will just get worse and worse,” they say. “That’s how it is.” But what if Sam Abbott had said that about I-95? Takoma Park is a living breathing example of how we don’t always have to accept things as the rest of the world presents them to us. The Takoma Junction project sits at the intersection of grief and hope. You are rolling rapidly into that junction, and you will either have to stop to reconsider or close your eyes and pray that things somehow turn out okay. I, and many hundreds of others, are asking you to stop. It is not too late to keep Mayor Abbot’s vision of an inclusive and equitable city alive.</p> <p>Thank you.</p>
5/31	Lauren Price	4	<p>I have lived in Takoma Park since the 90s. I have married, raised 4 children and 3 grandchildren in this community. My children went to all the schools around the area. My children attended Takoma Park Elementary, Piney Branch Middle School, and Blair High School. Takoma Park is a village of citizens who are family. We don’t need a parking garage. What? So random strangers can park from DC, MD and other areas who have no connection to our City. How about a doggie daycare, more playground space, indoor ice skating rink for us versus going to Silver Spring. Let’s have a space for adults to learn crafts like sewing, Glass blowing, cooking classes (French, Spanish, Italian, Thai). I had to go to PG to learn how to blow glass, yes I am a woman of color in her 50s who can blow glass. I serve as Chairperson of COLTA for over 9 years as a Commissioner. We need to maintain the culture and fabric of our community. This is why we have families living here. We are one of the safest places to live and work. We can walk at night freely without fear of strangers in our community because they are breaking into and stealing cars. Praying on innocent citizens who walk home at night and leave early mornings to ride the bus on Maple Avenue. I have been one of those people. We have no shootings, or home invasions like other places. First, second and third generation families live here. This is HOME to many. When I get visitors they say “we are a hidden gem”. They wonder how did I find this place? Why are we allowing a for profit garage the opportunity to be here in our community? They have no concern about our schools, safety, well being or streets and homes. What happened is Silver Spring over run, with new construction, as well as DC has run people the suburbs. My friends live in PG (Poor George) is what my children call it. We offer a stable, elite and trendy community which has nurtured young minds who will beour future leaders of tomorrow and some of them today. We have class in our little town. We have love of our community and the the police department are the best. You inviting trouble from other places to our “hidden gem”. Don’t make us unsafe or feel as though we can’t have solace where we live. I’ m proud of my town. I’ve lived other places and been to many cities. You can’t re-create what Takoma Park has. We have unity and flavor. They need to go and take up space on the old Walter Reed space in DC on Georgia Avenue.</p>

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*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