

City of Alexandria Planning Commission Meeting 6/4/24
Remarks by Pamela Graham
530 N Columbus St owner/resident

Hello. My name is Pamela Graham. I live at 530 N Columbus St, three houses from Pendleton St. My husband and I bought the house 13 months ago. We are new to this city, but we have a fair amount of experience living in historic walkable cities. I was president of the Historic Neighborhoods Association in Petersburg VA and active with Fredericksburg Historical Foundation. The latter had numerous requests to spot-zone property within the historic district but did a good job managing growth while maintaining quality of life for the neighboring residents. As you know, It's a delicate balance which is easily upset.

In our current residential neighborhood, we are nearly completely bordered by businesses. From the alley on Pendleton off N Alfred St, all the way to Washington St, the north side is entirely commercial. We have Mas Seafood, Chewish Deli, New Pentecostal Church, Novicare Orthodontics, Alexandria Dental Center, Peak Chiropractic, two offices now closed, and Bank of America. Oh, and throw in two long on-street Metro Bus stops. There is NO designated or off street parking for any of these businesses, with the exception of the Bank. They all end into busy Washington St where parking is not allowed.

I could speak about the noise problem. There are noisy middle-of-the-night semi-trucks delivering to the food establishments which wake up and disturb a number of my neighbors. I could speak about the rodent problem when my next-door neighbor called me to say she'd just seen a rat nearly as big as my 4-lb dog and that I should keep a close eye on the dog outside. (I have since called the City and they've been out to abate. Here's hoping it helps.)

But tonight, I'll simply focus on the parking availability, which is our lack of it. In this few-block area, we simply don't have

sufficient parking for the residents and the current businesses. It is so bad on weekends and at noon-time that I will walk or Uber where I need to go because if I give up my street parking space, I won't find another on my block. I'm fortunate. I'm retired. I can pick and choose when I go out. Others are not so lucky.

There are 9 parking places on both sides of Pendleton where the subject property along with 4 other businesses are located.

That's it. And these are to serve 5 offices, their clients and employees and three residences. On Pendleton in the next block, there are 12 parking spaces to serve the deli, seafood store, a church and 7 residences. There is no parking in any of the alleys. And now you think we can throw a restaurant into the mix. The street parking situation seems somehow worse in the last couple weeks. And then I noticed something. The Bank has newly stenciled every single parking space in its lot in 8-inch letters: Bank of America Parking Only. They are clearly aware and it doesn't exist on the photos you were provided.

You're conscientious commission members or you wouldn't have these jobs, so I know you've been out to check the parking situation around the subject property at various times of the day and night. If you haven't, I think you must abstain from voting tonight for lack of data to make an informed decision.

The list of comparison properties and photos you received with your packet is somewhat deceiving. There is commercial relief around most of these businesses. There is only one reasonably busy restaurant, the rest are, or function like, offices.

Spot zoning is bad. It hurts neighborhoods and it is lasting. No one appeals to upzone anything.

Please deny this request. There are empty restaurant sites ready to go. Don't downzone another office building for busy commercial use.

I would also like to add that I am familiar with the master plan's desire to remove the proffers from certain zoning. But the way in which these businesses were allowed access in the past doesn't fit all of the master plan criteria today. So you have to carefully

consider what currently exists and does not fit new business regulations.

And further, let's not get stuck on the concept of the little neighborhood coffee and pastry shop. We all know that that can easily morph into a sit-down breakfast, lunch & dinner establishment open into the late evening hours.

Thank you.