

Cleveland Park Citizens Association

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Committee on Consumer and Regulatory Affairs
Sharon Ambrose, Chairman
DC Council
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20004

Re: Restaurant Amendment Act of 2003 – Bill 15-510

Testimony of George Idelson, President, Cleveland Park Citizens Association

From our community's point of view, key elements of the proposed amendment seem to be a solution in search of a problem. What are you trying to correct? Did you imagine that established residential neighborhoods lack sufficient restaurants and drinking establishments? Not enough late night noise or rowdy customers? Too few traffic and parking problems? Too little trash and rodent infestations? Or maybe you were thinking that neighborhoods have way too much power over local businesses?

Would that *that* were so. The fact, is communities such as ours live in a delicate balance with their business neighbors. In Cleveland Park, we value having a variety of stores and we want them to prosper. At the same time, we don't want the inevitable impact they create to reach critical mass.

Finding a place to park near one's home is *not* too much to ask. Returning to a car whose sideview mirror has *not* been vandalized or rear bumper crumpled, is not an unreasonable expectation. Nor is *not* being kept awake by noisy carousers and having to dump their beer bottles and uneaten pizzas as you pick up your morning paper.

One-size-fits-all legislating may seem efficient, but in this case it doesn't meet the needs of diverse communities. That's why special exceptions and voluntary agreements were invented. They serve a useful purpose in allowing neighborhoods to negotiate the balance it takes to keep residential and business communities working in harmony.

In Cleveland Park, we have a commercial overlay that sets a limit on the number of eating and drinking establishments because they escalate rental prices and crowd out other needed stores. That leaves room for dry cleaners, a bakery, a nail salon, a tax preparer, an electronics store, even a do-it-yourself pottery shop. We've even learned to live with the largest screen movie house in DC. Granted, we aren't as impacted as Dupont Circle and Adams Morgan. But it wouldn't take much. Making it easier for bars to become restaurants is the last thing we need.

Perhaps you think voluntary agreements are over used. If so, I don't know whom you are listening to. In Cleveland Park, we currently have no voluntary agreements that I am aware of. I'm told that the last one was allowed to lapse because the issue it was premised on seemed to resolve itself.

The fact is, we get along pretty darn well with our business community. But it wouldn't take much to destroy the balance of residential and business. Yes, we have our issues, and they have theirs. But even as we speak, we are exploring ways to build an even closer working relationship with the seventy plus businesses on Connecticut Avenue between Macomb and Porter.

The residents of Cleveland Park want you to reject this amendment. Don't fix something that isn't broke.

Sincerely,

George Idelson