



Testimony of Glover Park Main Street before the Committee on Business and Economic Development

Friday, April 7, 2023

Mr. Chairman, Members of the Committee:

On behalf of the founders and Board of Glover Park Main Street, we thank you for this opportunity to update the Committee on our work and look forward to FY24.

Nestled between two sought-after residential neighborhoods in the Upper NW sits Glover Park, a leafy and welcoming community. One of two Main Street programs in Ward 3 without access to a Metro, Glover Park's commercial corridor sits along the steep bit of Wisconsin Avenue, connecting Cathedral to Burleith. Some residents have lived in the neighborhood for decades if not generations, while recent demographic changes have brought more and more young families to the community in search of good schools and single-family homes.

Similarly, the business community is anchored by a number of legacy businesses like Rocklands BBQ, Theodore's furniture, and Old Europe, while attracting vibrant newcomers like the Michelin-starred Xiquet and Communikids. Last year two new apartment buildings came online, introducing a mix of residential and affordable housing units to the corridor. More multi-unit residential development is needed to help increase neighborhood density and available foot traffic.

Glover Park is home to 78 storefront businesses, 8 rather large vacancies, and 56 small businesses co-located inside Launch Workspaces. Of the 78 storefronts, 15 are legacy establishments, 19 are minority-owned or immigrant-owned, and 14 are women-owned. There has been an increase in medical office tenants inside some of the larger properties on Wisconsin, which is very welcome and helps with daytime foot traffic, and a growing list of interior design-related businesses, a sector GPMS has been courting since our inception.

That data shows that Glover Park is a slice of what is trending across the region, and like other neighborhoods, the outlook in Glover Park coming out of the pandemic is mixed. In FY22, five businesses closed, some so familiar to the neighborhood that it raised attention and concern. Conversely, 10 businesses opened in Glover Park last year, and all remain operating and growing today. Unfortunately, it's the closures that leave a mark. Once a neighborhood loses a beloved business, even if the physical location is later filled, it is extremely difficult to overcome the psychological impression that economic trouble is imminent.

Persistent vacancies are a very big problem in Glover Park. Many large spaces, most more than 4,000 sq ft, remain vacant for years. Currently, Glover Park has 30,000 sq ft of storefront space vacant. Maybe all do not qualify for increased property tax fines under DOB's regulations, but it



is highly visible dark space at ground level, deterring foot traffic and disincentivizing investment. Persistent vacancies are our #1 “address-able” problem, and we welcome any attention and assistance to the matter.

Public safety concerns and property damage are increasing on the corridor, which contributes to lower foot traffic and declining sales, particularly among businesses reliant on evening customers. Business owners are struggling, with problems real and perceived. Like small businesses everywhere, the owners and staff are exhausted, having tried to reinvent themselves year over year, spending on new technologies, maybe rebuilding their physical space, efforts to meet the changing needs of today’s retail environment. After receiving such generosity in the form of grants and tax relief, returning to normal seems to cut deeply, coupled with skyrocketing costs and staff shortages. Mentally and physically, owners are fatigued, seemingly always teetering on whether to keep going or close shop.

At the Main Street level, we focus on what’s working and how we can help. GPMS is small but scrappy. Last year, we renovated three building facades, designed and installed three business signs, one mural, and launched a citywide awareness campaign using radio ads and the back of WMATA buses, beckoning visitors to see what Glover Park has to offer. We gave out \$40,569.19 in subgrants to 10 local, small businesses, and provided more than 200 hours* of technical assistance (*under the previous method of counting. Moving forward, Main Street programs will count and provide TA services differently, accounting for nearly 200 hours per quarter.)

In the three years GPMS has operated, we have granted out \$155,000 to small and local businesses in Glover Park. Add to that helping them access Federal, local, and private grants, we have brought well more than \$1 million to the community, helping businesses bridge the pandemic and uncertainty of the past year. We have thrown two wildly successful Art All Night festivals, featuring bands, local artists, kids programming, refreshments, and our singular attraction – Wingo’s wing eating contest – a nod to the culinary arts of the corridor.

Each year we grow. We reach more businesses, some reluctant to open their books and share their concerns in years past. The work has a cumulative, snowball effect, building on the previous work, demonstrating outputs and outcomes in a way that is hard to speak in numbers. The data accounts for big projects - checks we wrote, numbers and types of businesses we serve - but it cannot account for the nature of the job we actually perform. Glover Park Main Street started at the end of 2019, weeks before the pandemic hit, barely allowing us to launch a web site and introduce ourselves to the community before businesses were forcibly shuttered. Probably because of that, we have built these relationships as if forged in fire. We have trust among the small and local businesses. We listen to their concerns, landlord issues. We know when they are behind on their taxes or rent or payroll. We meet their families, see them day after day, and watch as they take on great risk and personal sacrifice to keep their businesses alive.

From the outside it may seem like anyone can step into this work, but it’s not so easy. GPMS and our counterparts across the city do so much with very little. We have and will continue to breathe life into struggling communities, using one-person staffs and the tightest of budgets. Year



afteryear, Main Street programs in DC fill in the gaps where charity isn't and government cannot, a unique and admittedly strange space to occupy.

We thank the Committee for the continued funding and assure its Members that we will continue to be inventive and compassionate and to drive interest and investment into the Glover Park community using all our resources. We ask the Committee to consider an increase in funding for the Main Streets, however. Main Street programs have not received any additional funds throughout nor since the pandemic, not even a COLA increase in pay, while the city has adjusted pay scales to meet rising inflation and costs. And on costs, we have data. Everything is more expensive - from requirements for the grant like insurance, accounting, licensing, to any and every project we undertake - the price tag is much higher than a few years ago. Annually to make ends meet, portions of the budget are paid for out of private funds. Yet some of us are so small, it's difficult to compete for private sector dollars, traditional sources of which have dried up post-pandemic. We operate on the very skinniest of shoestrings.

GPMS plans to work harder in 2023 to tap into new sources of funding as we are being called to do more, and to do more over a longer timeframe, and that work requires a deeper investment. We welcome any additional support.

With more, we can do more.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for the opportunity to present this testimony about the work and needs of Glover Park Main Street. We are happy to be available to any of the Councilmembers and staff with questions or for further information and invite you all to the neighborhood to walk around and see our work in person.

Respectfully,

Kate Dean

Kate Dean
Executive Director