

Testimony for the Public Hearing of CASE NO. 16-11

**Park View Community Partners & District of Columbia –
Consolidated PUD & Related Map Amendment @ Square 2890, Part of Lot 849**

**Before the Zoning Commission
Chairman Anthony Hood**

December 5, 2016

By Michele Leah

My name is Michele Leah and I am a volunteer with JUFJ. I live in Columbia Heights and I walk through Park View almost every day. I often work out of a coffee shop on Georgia and Lamont. It may be hard to imagine given my current privilege, but I know what it's like to face the prospect of losing my housing and being forced to relocate. When I was a teenager, my father became unemployed for an extended period of time. My mother didn't work due to mental illness, and when I was a junior in high school, we found ourselves on government assistance. Our housing situation became unstable and the possibility of being forced to move from the neighborhood that I grew up in, from my school mid-year, where I knew my teachers, and had friends, became a real threat. Through a turn of fate, our situation improved drastically just in time to save us from moving. However, had it not, the effects could have rippled through the rest of my life. Switching schools at that point could have been detrimental to my grades and to my social adjustment. It's possible that I would have been less interested in applying to colleges, or less able to develop the skills needed to attend as I would have been focusing my attention on readjusting to a new environment.

This experience is part of why I'm so passionate about fighting for affordable housing here in DC.

The Park Morton public housing apartment complex is in dire need of repair and this redevelopment project is a good thing. However, the current residents of Park Morton should not have to be displaced to other neighborhoods, far away from their jobs, and schools. I know how scary and damaging that prospect is.

Bruce Monroe is a temporary park site that is underused and half-vacant. This development will ensure that there is permanent park space, with play areas, a community garden, and sports areas as part of the redevelopment. The whole neighborhood will benefit from having permanent green recreation space.

The "Save Bruce Monroe Park" group's concern is one born out of racism and classism. Some of my neighbors are crying out, "not in my backyard!" **I say YES in my backyard!** I fully support a development on public land where 2/3 of the housing will be affordable; a public housing redevelopment planned in order to provide housing without displacing residents from their

neighborhood; a development that adds affordable housing and other amenities to the neighborhood without taking any amenities away.

I have been a resident of this neighborhood for 3 years and plan to remain for many more years. I feel that it is important that we maintain the neighborhood sustainably for all who live here. People are more important than tennis courts.