



# Coalition for Smarter Growth

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Testimony before the D C Zoning Commission

Support for ZC No 13-14 – Vision McMillan Partners & District of Columbia  
Stage 1 Master Plan, Open Spaces and Parks, and Community Center (Parcels 6 & 7)

by Cheryl Cort, Policy Director  
May 1, 2014

Please accept these comments on behalf of the Coalition for Smarter Growth. The Coalition for Smarter Growth is the leading organization in the Washington, D C region dedicated to making the case for smart growth. Our mission is to promote walkable, inclusive, and transit-oriented communities, and the land use and transportation policies and investments needed to make those communities flourish.

We wish to express our support for the Master Plan and open space elements for the adaptive reuse of the McMillan Sand Filtration Plant. We have tracked the review process at the HPRB for the last year. This thoughtful plan restores all the major historic features, along with creating a new large park that celebrates the distinct historic elements and function of the former industrial site.

In addition to the open space and historic preservation components, the plan also integrates new housing and commercial uses to foster vitality, safety, and meet community and citywide needs. This ambitious plan offers significant public benefits and is a breakthrough in the long stalemate over how to adaptively reuse this fascinating historic industrial landscape. The proposed project includes a variety of benefits: large new park, community center, smaller open spaces, restoration and adaptive reuse of historic structures, stormwater management to help control flooding, and mixed use development. This is a good compromise for meeting historic preservation goals while delivering broader public amenities.

We note the large new park occupying the southern end of the site was expanded to 6.2 acres, and connects to a restored South Service Court with its sand bins, regulator houses, filter bed portals and court walls. We appreciate the integration of the South Service Court and its historic structures into the northern access point for the new park and community center. As part of the park, a new recreation center will include a pool and other facilities, along with outdoor recreation area. These facilities will serve a larger area given their distinct context. A portion of Cell 28 will also be preserved for future adaptive reuse, giving the opportunity to incorporate this underground historic structure into the community center and park.

The preservation of Cell 14 at the northwest corner of the site offers more open space and historic preservation adjacent to the medical office building with a direct connection to the building. This connection should help users walk from the front drive to the open space on the other side of the building.

**Transportation:** The plan provides a new street grid and traffic signals that connect the site to its context – this is very welcome. The new street grid will help distribute driving trips, and invite more walking and bicycling. Walkers and bicyclists will especially have better access in an area that has largely been cut

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off by large landscape features such as the fenced off 70-acre Army Corps of Engineers reservoir site, the inward-looking Washington Hospital Center compound, and the nearby cemeteries. The proposed active uses that adapt historic structures will give new life, access and connectivity to the area. The uses and street network will knit together a part of the city that has expanses of inaccessible and uninviting spaces, and connect the important Washington Hospital Center to the city and its surrounding community.

We commend the re-creation of the corner stairs and Olmstead walk as an attractive historic restoration feature, but we ask the Zoning Commission ensure that the walk and berms do not undermine the utility of sidewalks or access to the site.

Our main area of concern regarding the transportation elements are the traffic mitigation measures proposed for the new vehicular traffic generated by the project. We agree with DDOT's assessment that more effort should be put into vehicle trip reduction efforts. This starts with reducing the high proposed off-street parking supply, but includes other measures such as promotion of transit use and bicycling, and appropriately-priced parking.

We are also concerned about the many driveways between First St. NW and North Capital create many conflict points with pedestrians and bicyclists. These driveways should be designed with very tight turning radii or eliminated altogether.

The other major transportation issue is ensuring that site gets enough transit service. Transit is planned for the area since it's a major employment area, but the city should commit to phasing in increased transit service including enhanced H and 80 bus service, possible Circulator service, and eventual streetcar on Michigan Avenue. This is preferable to private shuttles.

We commend the project for providing Capital Bikeshare stations at the site and nearby Metro stations. We concur with DDOT's recommendation to better locate short term bicycle parking in front of the medical office building entrances, along with better located showers. We are concerned that off-site bicycling routes to nearby Metro stations need improvement. In addition to the bicycle lane on First Street, we ask DDOT to propose additional off-site facilities to improve bicycling connections to Metro stations and other areas.

## **Conclusion**

For decades, access to this 25-acre historic industrial landscape has been prohibited, contributing to the wide gap between surrounding activities and neighborhoods in this area. The proposed plan is the best chance to create a grand new public park and community center, and preserve and make publically accessible, the fascinating historic features of this site.

The plan for complementary new uses of retail, offices, and residential will contribute to the safety and vitality of the new large park. We appreciate the significant affordable housing component in this plan (though would like to see more), the open space, historic preservation, retail, housing and medical office buildings as contributions to addressing community and citywide needs. The proposed plan for preservation and development is a laudable compromise.

Thank you for your consideration.