

**MCMILLAN PARK TESTIMONY**  
before the  
**ZONING COMMISSION, May 13, 2014**  
Concerning Case 13-14  
by  
**PHILIP J. BLAIR, JR.**  
**Resident, Ward 5**

My name is Philip Blair, Jr.: I am a resident of Ward 5. I have no financial interest in the project before you, except as a taxpayer in the District of Columbia. (This is information you should require from every witness before you.)

I want to make three points: the first concerning my gratitude to the Vision McMillan Partners; the second adding my own conversion experience to those you have heard before; and the third taking issue with the testimony of some good friends in the opposition to the VMP Plan.

First: some of my best friends in Washington are the colleagues in opposition I first met when my hair was red twenty-odd years ago. The appalling results of the recent planning exercise in the hands of the Vision McMillan Partners has brought into my circle of good and trusted friends a whole new group of new acquaintances also concerned about McMillan. Many of them have testified or will testify before you. You all, like me, cannot fail to be impressed by the enthusiasm, earnest hard work, ingenuity, intelligence, and civic responsibility that they embody. So, thank you, VMP. Without you I may not have met them or known them so well.

Second: You have heard some people testify that their support for some project at McMillan has been turned to opposition by the plans that VMP has presented. I once would have put myself in the camp of those who would permit economic development at

this site in order to be able to save part of this precious site and its unique features, especially those under ground.

No more: I have come to the conclusion that the Government of the District of Columbia is quite incapable of treating this site with the care and vision that it deserves. If my choice is another thirty years of fences and demolition by neglect, I will take that over what is offered today. When the city comes to its senses again, then we will still be able to do better.

The bureaucratic structure created for this project is an invitation to waste, fraud, and dishonesty—all ugly but accurate words that I do not use lightly.

Review of the Deputy Mayor for Planning and Economic Development's project by his underlings—the Historic Preservation Review Board and the Office of Planning—is farcical: sock-puppetry and ventriloquism. Review by other District bodies has been no better. This means that the two most independent actors—the Zoning Board and the Mayor's Agent on Historic Preservation—bear the entire weight of the decision to proceed or not with this project.

Dishonesty by public servants and employees of the VMP is a serious charge: here are some examples in a long list.

- The structural engineers have testified that the site is dangerous; that any vault could fail catastrophically at any time. But

DCWater is using these very cells to contain up to 3 million gallons of effluent. The weight of that is just over twelve thousand tons. And a catastrophic failure involving that amount of sewage right upslope from the Capitol would be a catastrophe indeed. If you believe that the VMP's structural engineers are right, DCWater (the only part of D.C. government to have acted responsibly at McMillan) is terribly irresponsible. Time is telling.

- The historical consultant has said that the interior of the 25-acre site was never a park, and flacks for the project have said that "McMillan was never a park." They use the term "industrial site" sneeringly. Well, I'll believe my neighbor Mrs. Freeman who tells me how she used to sleep out in the park with her family in the summer, and the aerial photographs showing baseball diamonds and a criss-cross of paths on the site. P.S. The C&O Canal is an "industrial site": such a shame it did not disappear under an interstate through the city.
- You have been told by sworn VMP agents that the site is "impervious": well it isn't. It is perhaps the most extensive green roof in the country, and certainly one of the oldest.
- The public surplus hearing, last June, surprised the proponents of the plan. More than forty citizens testified against surplus and only four or five parties testified in favor. So, what to do? The record of that hearing has been made to disappear. Reiterated promises to make this record at least partially available have been made but never kept: but I am sick and tired of being played for a fool. Maybe you all can shake this

loose: good luck. By the way Both the Deputy Mayor and his deputy, Mr. Miller, who was at the surplus hearing, have characterized the results dishonestly in testimony to council.

In short, the reckless mixture of special interests and governmental irresponsibility that has characterized this process leads directly to this misbegotten proposal.

Finally, a third point: to use a term that Tony Norman himself has used, I love all my fellow opponents to death. But I must disassociate myself from any colleague's testimony in praise of the professionalism and earnest good intentions of organizations such as the HPRB (which didn't even know that covenants bearing on the historic preservation of the site were in force, until told so by the opponents in the last months of their process) and which ruled unanimously that the VMP plan was tantamount to the "demolition" of the site as a historic legacy, but allowed the project to proceed anyway after opining on the colors of the buildings.

The office of Planning forgot parks for NoMa, and it now doing an unsatisfactory retrofit of park space into the area at great expense. The cost is roughly equivalent to the \$50 million they will spend in destroying McMillan as a public park accessible to all.

We live in bad times for public planning, if this VMP plan is any indication. I urge you to reject it.

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