

REPORT TO
D.C. OFFICE OF ZONING

2009 DEC -7 PM 12: 28

4812 Tilden Street NW
Washington DC 20016
December 3, 2009

Mr. Marc B. Loud, Chairman
Board of Zoning Adjustment
441 Fourth Street NW, Suite 200 South
Washington DC 20001

Re: *Emory United Methodist Beacon of Light Church, 6100 Georgia Avenue
NW, BZA No. 17964*

Dear Mr. Loud and Members of the Board:

As a historian of the Civil War and long-time resident of Washington, I was distressed to learn of Emory United Church's plan to erect an abrupt five-story wall looming over Fort Stevens.

Fort Stevens is a critical Civil War historical site. The conflict there in July 1864 was a major event in our national history. Though the size of the armies in action there was not as great as at Gettysburg or Antietam, the battle there ranks with those hallowed landmarks in its importance to the outcome of the war.

Jubal Early's Confederate force came within six hours and five miles of pushing past Fort Stevens and capturing Washington. If that had happened, we might well be living today in a country divided between North and South. It is certain that if the Rebels had succeeded there, Britain and other European countries would have recognized the Confederate government diplomatically-a long-sought goal of Jefferson Davis and his generals. This would at least have prolonged the war, and potentially reversed its outcome.

I wrote extensively about Washington during the Civil War in my book, "Freedom Rising," published by Alfred A. Knopf in 2004. It was the fourth in a series, following my books on Richmond during the war and on the battles of Chancellorsville and Cold Harbor.

BOARD OF ZONING ADJUSTMENT
District of Columbia

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CASE NO. 17964
EXHIBIT NO. 34

At Chancellorsville in 1863, Confederate General Robert E. Lee won his greatest victory over the Union army, driving it back across the Rappahannock River and causing Lincoln to moan at the news, "My God! What will the people say?" At Cold Harbor in 1864, Lee dealt Union General U.S. Grant his worst defeat, a one-sided slaughter after which Lincoln said it seemed that "the heavens are hung in black."

Hundreds of acres of those battlefields are preserved by the National Park Service, and visited by tens of thousands of tourists, scholars and schoolchildren each year. Yet neither of those battles meant as much to the nation's future as what happened at Fort Stevens, which is now a tiny island of dramatic history surrounded by decades of urban development.

I have lived in Washington for forty years; my wife has lived here all her life. I fully appreciate the church's role in the community, and understand its right to appeal zoning laws as vigorously as any citizen. But I strongly believe that it would be wrong for any neighbor to diminish the site of such an important event in our nation's history. It would be a mistake socially, economically, and for the image of the District of Columbia in the eyes of the nation. While it is the right of the developer to appeal the District's regulations, it is the duty of the government to make such decisions with awareness of how they will be seen in years to come.

I hope the Board will take this long-range view and require drastic changes in the church's planned addition, to prevent historic Fort Stevens from becoming another case of rushing today and regretting tomorrow.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ernest B. Furgurson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Ernest B. Furgurson

Tel: 202/362-6546