

CIVIL WAR PRESERVATION TRUST

Saving America's Civil War Battlefields

John L. Nau, III
Chairman

James Lighthizer
President

December 15, 2009

#17964

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Mr. Marc B. Loud, Chairman
D.C. Board of Zoning Adjustment
441 4th Street N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20001

Dear Chairman Loud :

On behalf of the 55,000 members of the Civil War Preservation Trust (CWPT), a national nonprofit organization dedicated to protecting our nation's Civil War battlefields and promoting appreciation of these hallowed grounds through education and heritage tourism, I would like to thank you for providing me with the opportunity to comment on the proposed Beacon Center at the Emory United Methodist Church. To date, CWPT has protected more than 28,000 acres across the United States.

The proposed Beacon Center is immediately adjacent to Fort Stevens, a unique historic site owned and maintained by the National Park Service through Rock Creek Park. As the site of the only Civil War battle fought in the District of Columbia, as well as a location included on the National Register of Historic Places and the District of Columbia Inventory of Historic Sites, Fort Stevens deserves special consideration as nearby development is considered. The site has been designated a Class B battlefield by the Civil War Sites Advisory Commission, a blue ribbon panel created by Congress in 1990, making it one of the 150 most significant engagements of the war.

Although we appreciate the sensitivity the Emory United Methodist Church has shown to the historic and fragile nature of Fort Stevens, as well as the community's longstanding stewardship of the site, we are concerned about the development's scale and the height of the proposed courtyard wall surrounding the structure. We are apprehensive about the impact it would have on the overall visitor experience on Fort Stevens and the long term effects it will have on future protection of the overall Defenses of Washington, of which only 11 of the original 68 forts remain.

CWPT is particularly concerned with the proposed five-story wall along Old Piney Branch Road that would create a significant visual intrusion on the fort, as well as the Beacon Center's overall size and floor plan. We respectfully ask that Emory United Methodist Church scale back its development plans so as not to exceed the height requirements of the District of Columbia Zoning Regulations according to Section 770.1 and the Floor Area Ratio requirements of Section 771.2.

The Battle of Fort Stevens occurred on July 11-12, 1864, as Confederate troops under the leadership of Lt. Gen. Jubal Early attempted to capture Washington, attacking from the north. The assault was repulsed by a contingent of veteran troops that had been rushed by train from the siege lines around

(more)

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BOARD OF ZONING ADJUSTMENT
District of Columbia

CASE NO.

EXHIBIT NO.

HAGERSTOWN OFFICE

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Board of Zoning Adjustment
District of Columbia
CASE NO. 17964
EXHIBIT NO. 50

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Petersburg, Va., to bolster Washington's defenses, resulting in 874 casualties. Perhaps most notably, Abraham Lincoln came under fire from Confederate sharpshooters while he observed the battle, the first time a sitting American president had come under direct enemy attack.

Fort Stevens was built in 1861 as part of a 37-mile-long ring of fortifications designed to protect the Union capital. Not only did these "Circle Forts" defend the nation's capitol during the Civil War, they also hold significance to the African American history in Washington. Many blacks fled to these forts to seek freedom and remained after hostilities ended, establishing tight-knit communities that have existed for nearly 150 years. Fort Stevens and the Brightwood neighborhood are prime examples of this phenomenon, with the presence of the fort and the culture and traditions of those early African-American residents still shaping the community today. So intimately is the fort tied to the neighborhood that the recently unveiled Brightwood Heritage Trail is subtitled "Battleground to Community." Further, the original fort was much larger than the remaining preserved portion, and the United Emory Methodist Church site once fell inside those walls, meaning that construction also raises archaeological concerns.

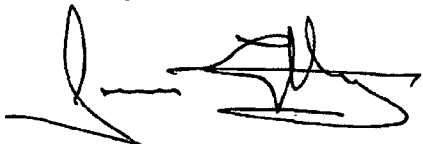
Aside from its historical significance, Fort Stevens is also a rich resource for heritage tourism, attracting visitors from across the nation. It is central to the ongoing efforts of the nonprofit organization Cultural Tourism DC to encourage visitors to explore further than the Mall and experience the history and vibrancy of Washington's diverse neighborhoods.

In its General Management Plan for the Fort Circle Parks, the National Park Service calls for a plan that will link the various historic sites through a combination of walking trails and driving routes, as well as increased educational and recreational activities at those locations. The plan also deems it critical to protect the fringes of these parks from inappropriate development, placing special emphasis on Fort Stevens as the most pivotal of the forts. These steps are seen as an overall effort to raise the visibility of the parks, and attract more tourists to each site, particularly when coupled with the unique opportunities afforded by the upcoming Sesquicentennial of the Civil War beginning in 2011. But if the Emory United Methodist Church development moves forward as planned, a huge piece of the equation will be missing and cause the plan to deteriorate.

CWPT respectfully requests that the Board of Zoning Adjustment denies Emory United Methodist Church's application. We believe that granting exemptions for height and floor area ratio for this project would have an adverse impact on Fort Stevens and subsequently the other remaining Circle Forts.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide our comments on the propose Beacon Center. We would be happy to further discuss with you our position on this matter. Please feel free to contact either me or Maureen Redington on my staff at 202-367-1861 if you have any further questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "O. James Lighthizer". The signature is stylized with a large initial "O" and a long, sweeping horizontal line extending to the right.

O. James Lighthizer, President