

**Testimony to the District of Columbia Board of Zoning Authority
in Support of Case 17964: The Application of Emory United Methodist Church (EUMC)
for Variances Associated With the EUMC's Proposed Development
at Premises 6100-6120 Georgia Avenue, NW
(Square 2940, Lots 801, 802, 808, and 813)**

**Submitted by D. Kamili Anderson, Representing the
Brightwood Community Association, Tuesday, December 15, 2009**

Thank you for this opportunity to speak before this board. I want to be clear about one thing from the outset: My purpose here today is quite simply to make the most compelling case you will hear this afternoon **IN SUPPORT** of the Emory Beacon of Light's (EBOL) proposal for a major development—of the exact size and dimensions that organization has originally stipulated, height and otherwise—on Georgia Avenue abutting the historic Ft. Stevens site. For my neighbor's sake and for the historic legacy that many of us in Brightwood ultimately want to see Brightwood accrue, I hope I am successful.

I have been a resident of the District of Columbia for 36 years. I was a teenager when I arrived, so I guess you could say I practically grew up here, most of that time in the Brightwood and Petworth neighborhoods. But as I move ever more rapidly into my senior years, unless I begin to see some more significant and drastic changes on the major commercial corridor within my current neighborhood of Brightwood—namely, the “Great Street” of Georgia Avenue—my dreams will increasingly be ones of having a license plate on my car other than a District of Columbia one. And I have one of the mayor's tags at that!

I was the president of the Brightwood Community Association for six years until this November and I have participated in a number of hearings such as this over the years. I currently chair its Business Improvement Committee, the role in which I present here today. In my time as president through to this very minute one of my hardest-fought and most overriding goals has been to see—and support with all my might in every possible instance—a massive renewal and infusion of commercial development on the Georgia Avenue corridor through Brightwood. I strongly believe that in order to be competitive and resist the outflow of retail dollars to areas like Columbia Heights and Chevy Chase- D.C. to the west, Silver Spring and Wheaton to the north, and downtown D.C. to the south, Brightwood, like the Nation's Capital in general,

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deserves a Great Street east of Rock Creek Park. Georgia Avenue, in the view of many Brightwood residents, is not just a North-South pass-way or a relic of historic times. Just like these areas—with their destination sites and venues and their major commercial-, residential-, and retail-based developments—the residents of Brightwood want to spend, shop, dine out, worship, and be entertained **WHERE THEY LIVE**. We are not second-class consumers! The EBOL project, for all its size and scope and along with its many conscientious, community-serving aspects, is poised to represent the beginning of positive progress and change in Brightwood.

Similar projects boding progress and change in Brightwood thus far have also been stonewalled by so-called “historic-preservation” and other efforts such as those that currently present resistance to the EBOL project before. And many of us in the Brightwood area don’t like it—at all! For example, another stalled project on Georgia Avenue near the Emory Church site, for which variances are being sought variance today, is the proposed redevelopment of the former Curtis Chevrolet dealership site. This project was stalled right into the current recession by preservationists’ insistence on preserving a transport-system car barn from an earlier era. Many of the residents did not care one bit about the car barn—not one bit—and many rightfully voiced their opposition to its inclusion in the developers plans in public forums with our Ward 4 council member Muriel Bowser. Yet the preservationists, none of whom, I suspect, lived in Brightwood, persisted and valuable design time was spent trying to assuage them. The result: has anyone seen anything going on at the Curtis Chevrolet site for many months? Nothing is going on, we missed the window of opportunity on that one, didn’t we? And now the door is closed for some time until the economy picks up, whenever that will be.

One advantage of no longer holding the leadership position of an organization affords is that I can at last be decidedly more opinionated and less measured in my positions. I can say something smells when I smell it, and can call efforts to block important, indigenous initiatives to uplift an underserved area—efforts that have suspicious motives and smell of uncaring or fear of competition, efforts that will have negative impact due to veiled, ulterior motives “bogus” and “B.S.” It’s a real relief. Still I will attempt not to appear crude in what I can only call my own offensive strike against this incursion on the proposed Ft. Stevens area development.

And yet here we have an indigenous proposal for development, from an organization that has a strong, firm history of service and regard in our neighborhood—an organization that has

been diligently and properly gathering a variety of resources to “pull off” this development plan at a time when others are pulling back—and quite frankly, they and we of Brightwood who want to see this development happen with all the force of our reasoning—are being stifled and stymied by unfounded assaults on this project. The Emory Church group project’s premise, like its proposed design aspects, is unassailable: to bring 91 units of much-needed housing to Brightwood which includes seniors, veterans, and affordable housing units; to create 20-25 permanent jobs with hiring preference to DC residents and those of Ward 4; to provide new, modern commercial space for a restaurant or coffee shop, with a portion of contract dollars set aside for small and economically disadvantaged businesses, along with and a full size gymnasium for youth sports leagues and other sports activities that currently have no venue in Brightwood as well as programs for supportive and transitional housing offered by the Beacon of Light. We of the BCA have approved of this plan, several times, and we are anxious to see it green-lighted to go.

Importantly, arguments that the EBOL development would block potential tourists’ views of Fort Stevens from Georgia Avenue are bogus. **B.S.!** Unless the opponents to this development foresee visitors to the fort in the near or distant future *flying* in to see it, a skyscraper could be built on the proposed EBOL development site and not block the view of the site any more than it already is! Plus, anyone who drives through the Brightwood Georgia Avenue corridor, on a regular basis or even just one time, knows that **you just can’t see the fort from that street!** And anyone driving along the backside of the fort on 13th Street also knows that if you blink, you’ll also miss it. A large, looming development such as that proposed by EBOL, with its landscaped rear side and dramatic rear façade would actually draw travelers’ eyes to the left to see the fort below. And they would feel much safer knowing such an impressive structure would be associated with the fort, whereas safety concerns are a real issue in that area currently given the blighted nature of Georgia Avenue surrounding the church today. Further, with the EBOL’s gracious and generous provision of space for a National Park Service memorial or souvenir shop for Ft. Stevens at the rear of the development next to the fort, what would Mr. Lincoln say? To steal a line from another, more infamous president: **Mission Accomplished!**

I wish to conclude by echoing the statements of others supporting this development plan here today by confirming my Association’s position that the revitalization of Georgia Avenue

and Brightwood is virtually **contingent** upon projects such as the one being proposed by the Emory Beacon of Light and Emory United Methodist Church. The residents of Brightwood need and want conscientious, quality development and housing from organizations already in our community who have shown a commitment to care about those they serve. And the District has seen too many of its indigenous churches pull up stakes and move out to the suburbs, taking hard-working, caring people with them to establish mega-structures in Maryland and Virginia that encompass a variety of programs that serve and draw others to those already relatively more well-served areas. We argue that the District should “keep the faith” with this project, and keep the faithful of Emory Church in D.C.

Now I don’t go to Emory Church myself, and I haven’t gone to church in many years. In fact, I haven’t found much to get religion about in the District in the past few decades. But I support Emory United Methodist Episcopal Church, its pastor Joe Daniels and congregants, its Emory Beacon of Light director Nkosi Ayize and president Hazel Broadnax and other staff, and all the many other exemplary programs and activities the good from which I have seen firsthand and participated in for many years. And I know, more than any outsider or outside group, the good they have done and strive to do. This project is one more step in the staircase that church is building to Heaven. In my heart, I know it is a good thing. But in mind, even more than my heart, it is a good thing for Brightwood, Ward 4, and the District. I and the Brightwood Community Association stand with them and their plan and will ***oppose wholeheartedly any*** attempts to prevent it from coming to fruition.