

the CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE
of the District of Columbia



January 18, 2010

Mr. Marc B. Loud, Chairman
D.C. Board of Zoning Adjustment
441 4th Street N.W.
Washington, D.C. 2001

BOARD OF ZONING ADJUSTMENT
District of Columbia

CASE NO. 17964
EXHIBIT NO. 57

RECEIVED
C. OFFICE OF ZONING
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Re: Emory United Methodist Church, 6100-20 Georgia Ave. N.W., BZA # 17964

Dear Chairman Loud and Honorable Board Members

Last month in advance of your initial consideration of Emory United Church's application for a zoning variance, we, the Civil War Round Table of the District of Columbia, sent you the attached petition signed by our members. We requested that the commission disallow the zoning adjustment request required to construct the proposed structure on the church grounds immediately adjacent to the site of Ft. Stevens. We applaud the Board's December decision to gather additional information before making a ruling on the variance and your directive to the parties to talk in hopes of finding a mutually agreeable compromise.

May we again reiterate that we support the church's goals of constructing a mixed-use building containing church, office, retail, residential, and recreational facilities. The community clearly needs investment and attractions to have a rebirth. The issue we have is with the proposed facility, not the concept. A five-story building directly abutting the very property line of the fort will be detrimental to its viewshed. Additionally, it appears that the plan is to turn historic Old Piney Branch Road into what is essentially an alley. The experience of visitors to the fort will be further degraded by loading docks and multiple trash dumpsters. What a greeting for the thousands of annual visitors to the only Civil War battlefield in Washington, DC.

The commission is reminded that like Fort Stevens' designation as a historic landmark, the existing church building and property are also considered historically significant and eligible for similar classification as sites where events of national historical importance occurred. In fact, the church property's distinct topography is due to the site's historical association with Fort Stevens/Fort Massachusetts as it sits atop a berm that is a remnant of these fortifications. These facts were recognized by its Historic Preservation staff in the Office of Planning's (OP) report on the Emory project.

From what we are able to gather from the OP's memorandum, it and its Historic Preservation staff completely neglected to take into account the project's impact on Ft. Stevens. As noted in the Office of Planning memorandum, "The intent of the lot occupancy requirement is to ensure the provision of open space, and of light and air to the project and to surrounding, existing development." We suggest that the current plan does not meet that provision as regards Fort Stevens and the request for variance be denied accordingly.

In addition, the OP memo further discusses changes to the project that would allow for "Reassessing the street frontage to further highlight the visual significance of the church: Retaining a sense of the hillside will complement the viewshed as one travels from the north, and supports the 'church on the hill' vision as reiterated during

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discussions with HP." This argument acknowledges the importance of viewshed for the church but totally ignores the impact on the viewshed of Fort Stevens!

Perhaps it is not the responsibility of OP to assess the impact of the project on Fort Stevens but rather that of the National Park Service (NPS) to do so. Perhaps it simply overlooked a critical piece of the assessment. Perhaps OP does not understand that Fort Stevens and Emory Church and its property are forever bonded by their collective history. Whatever the cause, this omission creates a fatal flaw in its recommendations and the Board of Zoning Adjustment would be neglecting its fiduciary responsibility if it does not take into account the project's impact not only on the historic property owned by the church but also on the NPS property adjoining it, Fort Stevens.

We encourage the commission to direct the Church to work with the NPS to find a mutually acceptable redesign of the project. The building could be re-oriented away from busy Georgia Avenue and Quackenbos Street and made to front Ft. Stevens and each would enhance the other. The thousands of visitors to the Fort could be drawn to linger and spend money at the shops that are part of the project plan as well as at other area establishments. Emory Church's project could provide a location for interpretation and information about the important history of both Fort Stevens and Emory Church. Fort Stevens could provide an attractive and peaceful green space for the project's residents and the church. Dr. Benjamin F. Cooling has proposed a germ of a solution that would be a win all the way around. The American Battlefield Protection Program has not allocated funding to Fort Stevens but it has granted millions to other battlefields and could and should be pressed to support this property. The possibilities here are so much greater than what has been put forward and to miss the opportunity to expand the vision would be regrettable to historic Fort Stevens, Emory Church, the surrounding community, and future generations.

The neglect and poor stewardship of Fort Stevens by the National Park Service is no reason to sanction a further degradation of this historic site. Instead the two parties should be encouraged to see the value of one to the other, and to build together on their respective responsibilities and missions to the mutual benefit of both and the surrounding community. A compelling argument could easily be made that ANY development on this property destroys its history. That is not our desire but if the project is not appropriately altered to prevent any further destruction and diminishment of Fort Stevens, we stand ready to make the argument that any development whatsoever at the Emory United Methodist Church property is both unacceptable and unsuitable.

Sincerely,



Susan Claffey
President
202-306-4988

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the CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE
of the District of Columbia

December 10, 2009

Mr. Marc B. Loud, Chairman
D.C. Board of Zoning Adjustment
441 4th Street N.W.
Washington, D.C. 2001

Re: Emory United Methodist Church, 6100-20 Georgia Ave. N.W., BZA # 17964

Dear Chairman Loud and Honorable Board Members

Attached is a petition signed by the members of the Civil War Round Table of the District of Columbia requesting that you disallow the zoning adjustment request of the Emory United Methodist Church to construct a new building on the church grounds immediately adjacent to the site of Ft. Stevens. The church's intentions are doubtless praiseworthy, but the existence of a five-story building next to the fort will significantly degrade the historical legacy of Ft. Stevens and of the city of Washington itself. It is the sole significant remaining piece of the only Civil War battlefield in Washington, D.C. — and what a battle it was.

The battle at Ft. Stevens arguably changed the face of the war. The Confederate army which battled in front of Ft. Stevens intended to seize the city, burn it and run the President and his cabinet out of town just as the British had done in 1814. President Lincoln was up for reelection that year and the results were far from sure after over three bloody years of civil war—in fact, Lincoln himself thought he would lose. The Democrats were running on a platform of peace with the South. The seizure of Washington would likely have tipped the election against Lincoln with all its dire consequences for the future of the U.S. and the future of the millions of slaves Lincoln had freed. Thus, Ft. Stevens carries weight equal to such iconic fields as Antietam and Gettysburg. It must also be remembered that Lincoln cared so much about the outcome that he himself mounted the parapets of the fort to watch the battle and give heart to his men.

The National Park Service has neglected Ft. Stevens but many people are working hard to change that and the Park Service is responding. In fact, we hope that the District of Columbia Government will join us in our petitions to the National Park Service to give the Washington Circle Forts, of which Ft. Stevens is a part, their just due and place in the history of this great city. We further hope and anticipate that there will be a significant improvement in the interpretation of Ft. Stevens in time for the sesquicentennial of the battle in 2014.

The site is important to the history of both our nation and to the city of Washington, DC. Please do not allow this legacy to be degraded.

Sincerely,



Susan Claffey
President
202-306-4988

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