

**Gary Thompson**  
 2840 Northampton St. N.W.  
 Washington, D.C. 20015  
 ANC Commissioner (4G02)

February 22, 2010

Mr. Marc B. Loud, Chairman  
 D.C. Board of Zoning Adjustment  
 441 4<sup>th</sup> St. N.W.  
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 Washington, D.C. 20001

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 BOARD OF ZONING ADJUSTMENT  
 District of Columbia  
 CASE NO. 17964  
 EXHIBIT NO. 65

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

Dear Chairman Loud and Honorable Board Members:

I am a long-time resident of D.C. and Ward 4, not far from Fort Stevens (near Fort DeRussy). I am also an ANC Commissioner and Chair of the Chevy Chase ANC (3/4G). I write in both my personal capacity and as an individual ANC Commissioner. I also write as a supporter of the Alliance to Preserve the Civil War Defenses of Washington D.C.

I understand that the applicant Church has refused to make any changes to accommodate the setbacks in the northwest corner of the proposed project (suggested as a compromise) as "economically infeasible." That is highly unfortunate. I respectfully submit this letter (in furtherance of my prior submission) to urge the BZA to decline the Church's application, for the following reasons:

**1. Fort Stevens is the one of the most historic sites in all of Washington, D.C.** This point has, of course, been well explained to the BZA in many submission, by respected historians and by the National Park Service. And for good reason. It was here that Union forces, observed by President Lincoln himself, repelled a Confederate attack in July 1864. Union forces arrived just in the nick of time to defend our city. In an arch from Fort Totten over to Fort DeRussy, with Fort Stevens stalwart in the middle, the Confederate Attack could not succeed. Had that attack succeeded, D.C. would have burned, many of its African-American residents would have been seized as slaves, and possibly our Union would have been split in two forever. Fort Stevens is the most under-appreciated historical site in D.C.

Moreover, the Brightwood neighborhood grew out of the African-American community which lived and worked around Ft. Stevens (originally drawn to the location to receive the protection of federal troops).

**2. The proposed development would, if allowed, partly ruin what is left of the experience at Fort Stevens.** The high wall would turn its back on the thousands of visitors to Ft.

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Stevens and substantially detract from the experience of witnessing a historic 19<sup>th</sup> Century battlefield where hundreds died to protect our city and nation. As the visitor looks northwards over the emplaced cannon and to the east to see the route of the 7<sup>th</sup> Street turnpike (now Georgia Avenue) used by Jubal Early, all that will be seen will be a high, heavy, solid wall of modern housing. It is simply not a valid argument by the Church to say, in effect: "well, development has already made it a poor visitor experience, so why not ruin it completely." With all due respect, the Church leaders appear to have no respect for the historical significance of what sits besides them. Surely, the project can be re-designed in a way that balances everyone's interests. The refusal to compromise is unfortunate.

**3. *The final demise of the Ft. Stevens experience would strike a huge blow to the long-term economic development of the neighborhood and the Georgia Ave. corridor.*** Brightwood has a rich and wonderful history, dating back before the Civil War, but very much rooted in the Civil War years. That rich history extends to not just Ft. Stevens, but Walter Reed, the Military Road School, Battleground Cemetery, so many other sites (and ironically, the Emory Church itself). This robust historical setting creates an incredible opportunity for long-term economic development built around such sites. This is nearly the most historic neighborhood in D.C. Of course, a city has to balance the need for economic development against the value of historic preservation, and in some cases, economic development must be favored. *But not here. The project would substantially adversely impact the historic site itself.* This would be like building condominiums next to the Lincoln Memorial, or a shopping mall in the middle of Gettysburg Battlefield. It would be a giant mistake.

I respectfully ask that the BZA disallow the proposed development. Especially as the Church is uncompromising, the BZA should not favor such a narrow short-term project over the incredible historic significance of Ft. Stevens. This is exactly the kind of case where the BZA is needed to act in favor of a much broader and more meaningful set of interests over the short-term interests presented, especially when the Church has so many alternatives to achieve its same goals.

Respectfully submitted,



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**Total Number Of Pages Including Cover Page 3**

**22. February 2010**

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| Mr. Marc B. Loud,<br>Chairman | DC Board of Zoning<br>Adjustment | 202-727-6072 |              |

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