

Talking Points for Esala Weerakoon – Deputy Chief of Mission – Hearing Before the Board of Zoning Adjustment: June 4, 2013

- Introduction
 - I am honored to represent my Country today. My name is Esala Weerakoon and I am the DCM - Deputy Chief of Mission - for the Embassy of Sri Lanka.
 - I have been DCM for two full years. As DCM, my position entails the following: meeting with local, national and international officials including those in the Congressional and Executive branches of Government. I also look after and am responsible for the general administration of the day-to-day affairs of the Embassy.
 - My previous posts have included the following assignments :
Ambassador to Japan for two years, Ambassador to Norway for two years, Deputy Ambassador to Great Britain for two years, and Deputy Ambassador to Australia for 3 years.
 - Sri Lanka has a population that slightly exceeds 21 million. The island is approximately the size of West Virginia. Almost 70% of its inhabitants practice Buddhism, with Hinduism being the largest religious minority. During World War II, Sri Lanka served as an important base for American and other Allied forces. And during the Persian Gulf War, Sri Lanka was the only country in Asia to offer refueling bases for U.S. warplanes.
 - Our Embassy here in the United States was founded in 1948, just months after our Nation gained its independence. Our Embassy has been housed at 2148 Wyoming Avenue, NW for quite some time; we have developed an emotional attachment to that location and do not plan on selling it any point.
 - I have personal knowledge of the matters about which I will testify today and that are presented in our Application
 - On behalf of the Embassy of The Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, we are requesting approval of our Zoning Application to locate the Sri Lankan Embassy/Chancery to 3025 Whitehaven St., NW
- The principals of our Embassy made the decision to move to the Whitehaven Street, NW location for the following reasons:
 - The addition of more work space for those employees who work for the Embassy onsite
 - Better aesthetics (both interior/exterior)→ Our current location on Wyoming Ave., NW is a townhouse; we have long-desired to house our Embassy in a true, stand-alone structure.
 - Essential storage space for files, documents and records
 - Closer proximity to home of our Ambassador who resides only 3 blocks away, just off of Massachusetts Ave., NW
 - Offices for Ambassador and Ministers upstairs
- Description of specifics

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- Although 18 total staff members are currently employed by the Embassy, fewer than one-half actually work at the Wyoming Avenue, NW location -- the balance of the work done by employees occurs off-site.
- There are no plans to add new staff if our Zoning Application is approved. Fewer than 8 employees will work at the Whitehaven, NW location. An additional 1-2 employees will handle visa application at the Wyoming Ave., NW location
- All members of the Embassy's staff, other than the Ambassador, are required to take public transportation to work. To be sure, no one will be parking on Whitehaven Street, NW, nor in residential zones nearby. This is a continuation of our policy that we have employed and strictly enforced at the Wyoming Avenue, NW location. Exhibit G of our Application contains a Memorandum from our office to this effect
- Our Embassy utilizes an online Visa-processing system. Doing so achieves efficiency by saving Visa applicants a trip to the Embassy's consular office. Not only does this system help to reduce foot and car traffic in and around the Embassy, but it also is an application of modern technology that better serves the needs of our Visa applicants.
- Our Embassy receives, on average, only a few visitors a day, many of whom are contractors who stay for a nominal duration (i.e., FedEx deliverymen, messengers and letter carriers, contractors, etc.)
- Other than an open house in August, which is a customary event for Embassies to hold when they open a new facility, we are not planning on any social events to be held at the Whitehaven Street NW location. Instead, our Embassy will utilize our Ambassador's residence, located only 3 blocks away from the Embassy on 30th Street, NW to hold social receptions
- Full-time employees will be charged with maintaining the cleanliness and integrity of the interior/exterior of the Property. We plan on contracting with a landscaping service to maintain the Property grounds
- The addition of our Embassy will increase cultural and ethnic diversity in the neighborhood, as there are no Asian embassies in the surrounding area
- Conclusion
 - We note the favorable reports submitted by the following entities:
 - Advisory Neighborhood Commission for Ward 3 has unanimously recommended our application;
 - DC Office of Planning has favorably recommended our application;
 - DC Department of Transportation has favorably recommended our application;
 - The U.S. State Department, Office of Foreign Missions, has favorably recommended our application.
 - In sum, we request approval of our Application; I am happy to take your questions and answer them on behalf the Government of The Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka