

Testimony of Jim McGrath, Chairman
D.C. Tenants' Advocacy Coalition (TENAC)
Before the Board of Zoning Adjustment (BZA)
District of Columbia Zoning Commission
Washington, DC 20001
May 6, 2014

Re: Case Number 18744 – “SB - Urban LLC”

Good morning members of the Board (Commission). My name is Jim McGrath, and I am chairman of TENAC, the D.C. Tenants' Advocacy Coalition, the lead tenant organization in the District, representing all who live in rental housing, or approximately two-thirds of the city's population.

I appreciate the opportunity to be heard on this important matter. I have long been active in historic preservation in the District, and have participated in numerous zoning cases over the years as one dedicated to preserving the quality of our great architectural heritage in this city in general and Dupont Circle in particular.

I am very concerned about the continued threat to that architectural heritage occasioned by the loss and what I call “disfigurement” of remaining architectural treasures in our midst. The demise of grand buildings in our city, or their historic interiors, continues apace. Converting the Patterson Mansion (Washington Club) a magnificent architectural treasure into micro apartments would increase that trend exponentially. That glistening white marble palace on Dupont Circle is up for grabs, and ripe for another redevelopment monstrosity. It proves once more that the Philistines are not longer at the gates, but have penetrated our city big time. Their toll is relentless, and is a testament to the myopia and lack of historical perspective of our city leaders, to say nothing oftentimes of the general public.

I have some relevant credentials appearing here today in that some twenty-five years ago I chaired a group known as the Citizens Coalition

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Against the Proposed Brookings Office Building, which resulted in a landmark zoning decision affecting a locale less than 200 feet from the front door of the Patterson Mansion (Washington Club). That ruling denied a zoning change on the 1700 block of P Street, NW, from “High Density Residential” to “Special Purpose,” and mandated that the block remain “All Residential.”

We take great exception to the redevelopment plans proposed for the Patterson Mansion (Washington Club). Carving the interior space of that property into 90 micro units reduces that property into a virtual “rabbit warren.” That is a desecration of a historical interior, and essentially takes a strikingly beautiful edifice out of preservationist purview and puts it essentially under commercial control. That is a disgraceful outcome for a magnificent architectural structure.

Desecration of the Paterson Mansion, coming in the wake of losing the towering Old Post Office Building to hotel use, by that human wrecking ball, Donald Trump, the sale of the Christian Heurich Mansion, and the all but demolition of the old Columbia Hospital for Women are just a few of the developers depredations. When the developers started on the Columbia Hospital, they had the Venus de Milo; when they finished all that was left was her belly button.

One report, identified as from *Linked/In* states that:

“A proposal to develop a historic Dupont Circle mansion into 90 furnished micro-units—parking not included – received ANC support on Wednesday night without a single protest from commissioners\ or community members in attendance.”

To that, I say they must all have been comatose.

The winds of urban change have reached gale force in Washington. Architectural redevelopment is transforming our Capitol City not with replacement grandeur and beauty, but with demolitions and desecration. It makes one wonder. Is nothing architecturally sacred in this National Capital? What's next? The Octagon House, Dumbarton Oaks? The National Cathedral?

Thank you.

Signed,
Jim McGrath
Chairman
TENAC