Southwest Neighborhood Assembly, Inc.
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Washington, DC 20024
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May 24, 2005

Carol J. Mitten, Chair
D.C. Zoning Commission
441 4th Street, N.W.
Suite 210
Washington, D.C. 20001

RE: Zoning Commission Case No. 03-30, amended
Square 643 Associates LLC

Dear Ms. Mitten and Members of the Commission:

The Planned Unit Development (PUD) identified as Case 03-30, amended, proposes to restore and maintain the historic SW African American landmark of the old Friendship Baptist Church, add approximately 21 compatible condominium units for home ownership, provide a nonprofit office use in the former sanctuary space, and provide ample parking for these uses, including underground parking.

The Southwest Neighborhood Assembly (SWNA) strongly supports this revised consolidated Planned Unit Development and Zoning Map amendment for several reasons. This church, known now as old Friendship Baptist Church, was "intentionally" saved from the urban renewal efforts in SW. The current Friendship Baptist Church is located a block away and recently celebrated its 135 anniversary. The whole building restoration of the original church must be applauded. All too often, historic preservation in Washington means a façade or a portion of a building is preserved and the remainder is demolished to make way for new construction. The results can be good, but all too often they are awkward or even demeaning to the historic building. The utilization of a nonprofit in the sanctuary will preserve the interior space and exterior views. This will be real historic preservation. The owner will place a commemorative landmark plaque on the church noting its cultural and historic importance to the SW African community.

Second, the Assembly recognizes the architectural firm of Shalom Baranes Associates, a well known Washington firm and architect, for its exemplary preservation including religious structures. This considerate design honors the church. It has the church as the center of the development and the primary focus of any visitor approaching it from Delaware Avenue SW, the main point of egress. In particular, the addition sets back from the important steeples and front of the church and is only four stories high on the north side. The Historic Preservation Review Board (HPRB) has granted concept approval to this design. The owner with Mr. Baranes proposes to utilize green building architectural standards for the project, another plus.

Third, the proposed residential and nonprofit uses will both be beneficial to the neighborhood and the immediate SW community. New homeowners will be added to the neighborhood, and the small nonprofit office, 5400 square feet, will be an excellent use of the church sanctuary space, which would be lost to the community and its members if the exception for this use is not granted. The nonprofit office use, we do not feel, will be so large as to create traffic or parking issues. This is strongly preferred, by the Assembly and adamantly voiced at the HPRB, than to restrict the sanctuary space to residential units. Additionally the owner has agreed to up keep the property free from trash and litter. This project will bring "back" life and the community to a part of SW that has long been vacant, neglected and the site of criminal activity. The property will be put back to active use in a beautifully restored condition with a handsome addition - a gift not only for the African Americans but all the SW and District residents.

We urge the Zoning Commission to approve this application. Mr. Richard Westbrook, VP SWNA, Mr. Ron McBee, SWNA Area Rep, and Mr. Bill Brawner, SWNA Area Rep and former member of Friendship Baptist, are intending to testify.

Sincerely,

Marge Maceda

Marge Maceda, President
202-554-1729

cc: Steve Tanner

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