SUMMARY OF TESTIMONY
Nathan W. Gross, AICP
Zoning Commission Case No. 03-30
Square 643 Associates LLC
June 20, 2005

I. Summary of Public Benefits and Project Amenities

Historic Preservation

- Major amenity: whole building restoration
- Small site and limited footprint for new construction to financially support restoration

Superior Architecture and Urban Design

- The elegant apartment additions are sympathetic to and enhance the historic character of the landmark church.
- The design has received conceptual design approval from the HPRB.
- OP concurs that architecture and urban design are superior.

Mixed Use – Residential and Nonprofit Office

- The housing units are important in expanding the housing supply in the neighborhood and the city, in terms of population increase and tax revenue enhancement.
- Nonprofit office use adds daytime population and activity to this somewhat isolated corner of the Southwest neighborhood.
- The proposed nonprofit office use retains basic openness of church interior compared to condominium conversion, which would permanently carve up and privatize the interior.

Affordable Housing

- The proffer is for one unit of at least 700 sf, 70% AMI, rental, for 20 years.
- OP concurs, except for the rental aspect in a condominium building.
- Applicant states that 20 years of affordable rental unit will help more households than 10 years of an affordable condominium.
- In terms of the unit being different from ownership units, some of the ownership units are very likely to be rented out.

Advances Important Comprehensive Plan Policies

- "Stabilizing and improving the District's neighborhoods" is one of the Major Themes of the Comprehensive Plan. This project will put a long-vacant church

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building and addition into productive use in a location that needs physical enhancement as well as people activity.

- Advances other policies re historic preservation, housing, environment, economic development.

LEED Features

- The application indicates that the building will include various LEED features.

Economic Development

- In addition to creating construction jobs and tax revenues generally, the applicant will provide a First Source Hiring and LSDBE agreements with the District

Asbestos Remediation

- The asbestos in the current stucco covering of the building could by regulation remain in place in a renovation. However, applicant will remove the contaminated stucco and replace it with clean stucco

Historic Preservation Plaque

- Applicant will affix to the church a brass plaque designed by architectural historian Emily Eig memorializing the church as Friendship Baptist Church, at a cost of up to $1,000.

Good Faith Efforts – Litter Control, Ride-Sharing

- The Applicant will work in cooperation with neighbors on two initiatives – litter control on nearby streets and ride-sharing in cooperation with the Corcoran School or Art assuming it occupies the former Randall School complex.

2. Limited Density, Major Public Benefits

- Much public benefit is accomplished on a small, constrained site.

- One-third of land area to the west of the landmark church cannot be built on because it is the setting for the historic church's façade.

- The volume of the church is preserved and is very low density.

- This leaves only 60 feet of land east of the church building and 54 feet north of the church for new construction to financially support the project.

- Despite these constraints, whole building restoration is accomplished together with superior architecture for the apartments and the other benefits and amenities cited above.

- The density increase is only from 1.8 FAR in existing R-4 to 2.66 FAR in the PUD. This is only a 0.86 FAR increase, and the result is still a moderate to medium density of development.

- Under R-4 zoning, Subsection 350.5 and related provisions allow a pre-1958 building to be converted to apartments as a matter of right, subject to a limitation of no more than one apartment use per 900 s.f. of land area.

- In this case, 16,644 s.f. of land area would allow 18 apartments as a matter of right. This is similar to the number proposed in the PUD. In the matter-of-right approach, the landmark church would be carved into private residences with no likelihood of ever being recreated as an open hall as it was in church use or of being reopened to the public.

- All in all, the PUD is a superior result, achieved with only a minor increase in density.

III. Land Use Context/Nonprofit Office Use

- The third issue is the question of suitable operational controls over the proposed nonprofit office use, taking the land use context of the site into consideration.

- By way of background, the great majority of approvals of nonprofit office use under Section 217 have occurred in dense row house or townhouse neighborhoods, especially Capitol Hill and Dupont Circle.

  - In these locations the subject property is typically a very large townhouse or a freestanding mansion. In either case there are close by residential neighbors, either with party walls or immediate proximity.

  - In such locations a nonprofit office use will bring weekday commuting and a higher level of activity at the property than the Zoning Regulations or immediate residential neighbors normally expect.

  - Accordingly, the Zoning Regulations require a special exception to review and control potential effects, as well as, in most cases, identification of the specific user.

- The land use context in this PUD is quite different, as reflected by the surrounding land use pattern:

  - Nearest residences - 60 and 180 feet to the north and northwest

  - Randall Recreation Center – large open space to the east

  - Former Randall Junior High School complex to the south – major redevelopment on large (2.4-acre) site is projected in near future.

- Southwest Clinic – 24,207 sf lot, 23,318 sf floor area – twice the size of proposed nonprofit use in PUD; visitor traffic.

- Delaware Avenue – 180-foot R.O.W., ends at traffic circle, very little traffic.

- In terms of any potential noise effects on neighbors, the Avenue also represents a large buffer zone extending to the southwest of the PUD site.

- Given this land use context and the proposed operational restrictions, it is difficult to imagine what adverse effects a small nonprofit office use would impose on neighboring properties.

- The Applicant has offered specific operational limitations on the proposed use, and the Office of Planning has concurred with nearly all of them. Given all of the factors mitigating potential adverse impacts cited above, the Applicant requests that nonprofit office use be authorized with these conditions without the necessity of subjecting the specific occupant to a further public zoning review.