Southwest Neighborhood Assembly, Inc.
401 M Street SW
Washington, DC 20024
Website: www.swdc.org Telephone: 202-554-8560

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

July 13, 2005

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

Dear Ms. Mitten and Members of the Commission:

Following is my written testimony that I gave in front of the Commission on June 20th.

Sincerely,

Ron McBee

Ron McBee
SWNA Representative 2d District
202-554-2021

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My name is Ron McBee, I have been a resident for over 25 years in Capitol Park, which is adjacent to the property at 734 First Street SW that this hearing is being held. I am a current officer and past President of my condo association. I am a member of the Police Service Area 104, a member of the First District's Citizens Advisory Council, and the elected 2nd District Representative for the SW Neighborhood Assembly as well as the co-hair of the SW History Task Force.

The Planned Unit Development (PUD) identified as Case 03-30, proposes to restore and maintain the historic SW African American landmarked church, adds a compatible structure for approximately 21 condominium units for home ownership; provides for a nonprofit office space in the former sanctuary space; and provides ample parking for these uses, including underground parking.

The Southwest Neighborhood Assembly (SWNA) unanimously in its May meeting supports this revised consolidated Planned Unit Development and Zoning Map amendment for several reasons. This church structure, known now as "old" Friendship Baptist Church in the community, was "intentionally" saved from the urban renewal efforts in SW. Rev. Whiting, the pastor of the Friendship Baptist Church at that time, was instrumental with others to persuade the Renewal

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Land Agency, RLA, the importance of the church at that time to the community and especially the African American Community. We hope to do that today to the Zoning Commission to allow for the restoration of the church and the keeping of the sanctuary space open for the community and future generations.

The current Friendship Baptist Church (FBC) is located a block away and recently celebrated its 135 anniversary. The FBC moved from the church being discussed today in the early 60's to its current site. The whole building restoration of the original church must be applauded. All too often, historic preservation in Washington means a façade or 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 office space in the sanctuary will preserve the interior space, which for many in the community is critical. This will be real historic preservation. The owner will place a commemorative landmark plaque on the church noting its cultural and historic significance to the SW African community. (Since the hearing the SW History Task Force has had on going discussions with our Website manager about placing information on the site for this structure and other important structures in SW. We will be offering space to the owner and the current Friendship Baptist Church.)

We would ask the Zoning Commission to consider two items with the utilization of the church sanctuary space as office space. The office space need not be restricted to a non-profit entity. We believe the space could be respectfully utilized for professional services such as an architect or lawyer. Additionally the use restrictions for the non-profit space seem overly restrictive for use by a non-profit organization or group. Most non-profit organizations that I have worked with are greatly dependent on their members as well as volunteers. This proposed agreement would limit and interfere, I think, with this relationship. I believe this situation could be resolved with the community if there is an issue with egress at the building.

Secondly, SWNA recognizes the architectural firm of Shalom Baranes Associates, a well known Washington firm and architect, for its exemplary preservation work, and of religious structures. This considerate design honors the landmarked 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. It is only four stories high on the North side. The Historic Preservation Review

Board has granted concept approval to this design we see today. The owner with Mr. Baranes proposes to use green building standards in the construction and renovation, another plus.

Thirdly, the proposed residential and non-profit uses will both be beneficial to the neighborhood and the immediate SW community. New homeowners will be added t the neighborhood, and the small non-profit office space, 5400 square feet, will be an excellent use of the church sanctuary space, which will be lost to the community and its members if the exception for this use is not granted. The non-profit office use, we do not feel, will be so large as to create traffic or parking issues. This is much preferred by those working to landmark the church than to turning the space over to residential units.

The preservation of the church alone meets the purpose and standard for a Planned Unit Development. There is no question that this is a high quality development that provides public benefits.

Additionally the owner has agreed to maintain and keep the property free from trash and debris as well as work with the other stakeholders in the adjoining area to join together to do the same.

The owner will use L.E.E.D. or green architectural standards for the project.

Although this is a historic preservation project and exempt from parking requirements, the owner is stepping forth with approximately 30 spaces, "underground" as well as offering to facilitate a ride sharing program.

This project is respectful of the site. With the PUD, the owner would be able to go to a FAR of 4.0. This project will be, as proposed, 2.72.

The project will bring "back" life and the community to a part of SW that has long been vacant, neglected and the site of much criminal activity. The property will be put back to active use in a beautifully restored condition with a respectful new addition – a gift not only for the African Americans of SW but also for all the SW and District citizens.

The SW Neighborhood Assembly strongly urges the Zoning Commission to approve this application.