



District of Columbia Government
Advisory Neighborhood Commission 6A
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Washington, DC 20013



**BEFORE THE
ZONING COMMISSION
OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA**

Capitol Place

Case No. 05-37

Statement of Drew Ronneberg

Representing

ADVISORY NEIGHBORHOOD COMMISSION 6A

October 1, 2007

My name is Drew Ronneberg. Today, I am authorized to act on behalf of ANC 6A before Zoning Commission for Case No. 05-37. ANC 6A is the neighboring ANC for this case, whose area encompasses the Eastern End of the H Street Corridor. We have asked for party status because the H Street NE Zoning Overlay encompasses properties in both ANC 6C and ANC 6A. This project raises a number of issues that will affect how provisions of the Overlay will be applied to future cases that directly affect the portion of H Street NE within ANC 6A.

ANC 6A's overriding concern throughout this case has been the proposed C-3-C upzoning, because the northern portion of this lot was previously upzoned from C-2-A to C-2-B as part of the H Street NE Zoning Overlay passed in 2006. Our concern is that the upzoning will unleash two forces that will both act to undermine the H Street Strategic Plan. First, ANC 6A is concerned that this case will embolden other developers to propose PUDs with associated map amendments that do not conform to the scale and character of buildings on H Street. Protection of the scale and character of the existing buildings is one of the key objectives of Neighborhood Commercial Overlays. Secondly, and just as importantly, ANC 6A is concerned that the approval of this map amendment would add fuel to the rampant land speculation that is already occurring on the Western end of the H Street corridor. Our ANC has filed two petitions with the Zoning Commission for text amendments to limit upzoning in the H Street Overlay in order to help curb land speculation.

The Eastern End of the H Street Corridor has seen the reoccupation of many of the 2-3 story historic structures and a resurgence in nightlife and economic vitality. In contrast,

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the Western end of the Corridor has not seen a resurgence comparable to the Eastern End, despite its many advantages, including its proximity to Union Station. This seeming paradox is easily resolved when one considers the economic incentives of property owners in the Western End of the H Street. If a property owner has a 2 story historic structure but believes that his property will be aggregated for a 6-8 story PUD, that landowner has no incentive to rehabilitate his property. Rather, his incentive is to keep his property vacant and just wait for a buy out offer from a land aggregator. Land speculation, which is encouraged by the approval of large scale PUDs, works against the revitalization of the entire H Street Corridor.

More than anything else, ANC 6A is asking the zoning commission to emphasize that the circumstances surrounding this case are unique and to send a message to other H Street property owners that they should value their properties at the heights and densities called for in the H Street NE Strategic Plan rather than the heights and densities of the Dreyfus project.

Compliance With Section 1305.1

Stanton Park Neighborhood Association has explained the significance of Section 1305.1 of the Zoning Code and how ANC 6A and SPNA believe that unique circumstances and exceptional merit need to be demonstrated by the applicant if matter-of-right heights and densities are exceeded in Neighborhood Commercial Overlay districts. ANC 6A believes that in this case those conditions have been met.

First, the H Street Strategic Development Plan calls for a 6-8 story building on this site, which is clearly larger than the height and density permitted as a matter-of-right in a C-2-B zone. Second, the site has unique circumstances including 1) the fact that it abuts the H Street Overpass 2) is envisioned as forming part of the Gateway to H Street NE and 3) is adjacent to buildings greater than 10 stories across H Street (Abdo – Senate Square) and 2nd Street (SEC building). Third, the design concentrates the massing at the NW corner of the site and elegantly transitions to the scale of the 2-3 story townhouses also on the square. In addition, the current design is much more sensitive to the architectural context of the existing buildings on H Street NE. Finally, through a mediation effort that finally addressed many of the residents' concerns, this project enjoys the support of the immediate neighbors in Square 752, ANC 6C, ANC 6A, SPNA and the Capitol Hill Restoration Society.

H Street has other blocks that are zoned C-2-B where the existing buildings are 2-3 story structures. On one of these blocks, the H Street Strategic Development Plan calls for the site to be redeveloped as a 3-4 story structure. ANC 6A believes that for these properties, the Zoning Commission should restrict PUDs to matter of rights heights and densities because a 90 feet and 6.0 FAR building would greatly exceed the density called for in the Strategic Plan and make the proposed building out of scale and context with the

surrounding structures.

Remaining Design Issues

The original design called for a modernist glass façade that drew its inspiration from the SEC building and essentially ignored the architectural context of H Street NE. Through the work of Mr. Lee Quill, the architects at Cook+Fox and the members of the mediation team, the building evolved into a structure that responded to 3 architectural contexts: the rowhouse context of G Street, the modernist context of the SEC building on 2nd street and the historic neighborhood commercial context on H Street. The design of the building has evolved tremendously and the community groups have reacted favorably to changes, including the emphasis on the verticality of the design elements on H Street as well as designing a building that treats the overpass as if it were a hill. A less capable architect might have simply ignored the overpass.

There are still a few design issues that ANC 6A and the other mediation members would like to see resolved before the PUD receives final approval from the Zoning Commission. ANC 6A asks that the record be kept open for 45 more days and that further design changes go through at least 2 iterations to allow community feedback. ANC 6A realizes that this is an unusual request, but feels that the community, and especially the immediate neighbors, have been asked to accommodate a building that is over 150,000 square feet above matter-of-right density and in return deserve a building whose quality of design and sensitivity to the surrounding design context is commensurate to the additional density that Dreyfus has requested.

The community has asked Dreyfus to consider design modification to the following three areas:

1. 2nd and H Tower. The fenestration, cornice, and other elements on the 2nd and H Tower do not yet appear to have a discernable rhythm that is clearly evident on the rest of the H Street façade. In addition, the green “screen” element and protruding glass seem out of place on H Street. We ask Cook + Fox to resolve these elements in a manner consistent with the H Street architectural context. The tower is of particular importance because it stands as the “gateway” into the H Street Corridor.
2. 3rd and H Corner. We encourage Cook+Fox to consider alternative materials rather than the wide expanse of glass for the 3rd and H Street corner. This corner is of particular importance because it will be the primary entrance into the building from H Street and will provide the design reference point for eventual redevelopment of the south side of the 300 block of H Street.

3. Top of H Street Façade. We encourage Cook+Fox to consider alternative materials rather than the horizontal expanse of glass for the top of the H Street façade. While it appears that Cook+Fox has used the glass to reduce the apparent height of the building, the additional light that would emanate at night has the potential to overwhelm the historic Convent on the north side of the 200 block in a bowl of competing light sources. The community asks that Cook+Fox consider alternative materials for the top of the H Street façade that do not have the problem of excessive light at night and better reflect the architectural context of H Street.

Recommendation

Like the other community groups, ANC 6A believes that because of unique circumstances of this project, it is permissible to exceed the matter of right height and densities per Section 1305.1. However, ANC 6A believes these circumstances do not exist anywhere else on the Corridor and that other sites should be limited to matter of right heights and densities to ensure that the scale and character of these 2-3 story buildings are protected.

Therefore ANC 6A is willing to give its conditional support to this project, subject to 1) the ZC finding that exceeding the matter-of-right heights and densities in this project does not set a precedent for future projects on H Street and 2) the final design issues are resolved in a manner that is consistent with H Street's architectural contexts and the guidance provided by the community groups.