

**TESTIMONY OF TIBER ISLAND COOPERATIVE HOMES, INC.
AND PAUL GREENBERG, INDIVIDUALLY, IN THE P.U.D. APPLICATION
OF MARINA VIEW TOWERS, Z.C. NO. 05-38**

I am Paul Greenberg and I am President and member of the Board of Tiber Island Cooperative Homes, Inc. and a resident at 430 M Street, Apartment 705, at Tiber Island. I appear individually and on behalf of Tiber Island and its residents and shareholders.

Tiber Island Cooperative Homes is a 389 unit housing cooperative on the south side of M Street, S.W. between 4th and 6th Streets. The Tiber Island complex (which includes both the Cooperative and the Tiber Island Condominium, a group of townhouses on the perimeter of the block) was built between 1964 and 1966. The buildings were designed by Keyes Lethbridge & Condon, and received an award for Design Excellence from the American Institute of Architects. Tiber Island faces the Marina View Towers complex, which is immediately across M Street, S.W.

Tiber Island was constructed as part of the Southwest Urban Renewal project, which is recognized as the nation's premier example of mid-20th century Modernist planning and a likely candidate for historic district status. The "Southwest Plan" reflected a conscious effort to break with the development pattern of the rest of the City, which typically consists of streets lined with buildings. The neighborhood includes projects designed by many of the premier local, national and international architects of the era, including I.M. Pei, Chloethiel Woodard Smith, Harry Weese, Morris Lapidus, Charles Goodman, Marcel Breuer and Edward Durrell Stone.

As Modernism comes into renewed focus as an important architectural movement, a complete and coherent Modernist neighborhood in Southwest can become a significant destination, holding significant value for the District of Columbia. In many respects, the Southwest neighborhood's reputation as a showcase for Modernist architecture is analogous to Miami Beach's status as the exemplar of Art Deco architecture. Architectural tours of the Southwest neighborhood already are common, and increasing numbers of young people have moved into the neighborhood primarily because of the renewed interest in Modernism and Modernist architecture. The State Historic Preservation Office has commented to community leaders that it anticipates the neighborhood will be designated a Historic District at some point in the not-too-distant future. Even without formal Historic District designation, the historic significance of the neighborhood – its history, its urban planning concepts, its building architecture and its landscape design – already has been documented comprehensively by the National Park Service through the 2004 publication of Historic American Building Survey (HABS) Report DC-856, "Southwest Washington, D.C., Urban Renewal Area," which we are submitting as an attachment to our testimony.

Southwest is a neighborhood designed to provide a very different urban experience from older portions of the city. Like the other Modernist complexes within the Southwest Urban Renewal area, Tiber Island includes a mixture of high rise and low rise structures. The large high-rise buildings at Tiber Island and many other Southwest complexes (including the existing

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Marina View Towers property) are oriented perpendicular to the neighborhood's main thoroughfares, creating vistas into the center of the block and beyond. The result is a densely populated neighborhood that is unparalleled for its vistas and its abundance of open space, trees and light. The all-glass I.M. Pei-designed buildings at Town Center (aka Marina View Towers) are perhaps the clearest statement of this desire for transparency.

Yet the very features that make the neighborhood so beautiful also pose the greatest threat to its preservation. For the most part, the design requirements for the community under the Southwest Urban Renewal plan limited buildings to occupying only 30% of the total land area of each site. Thus, major residential projects in the community technically are "underdeveloped" under current zoning standards, and the large tracts of open space and low-rise buildings on each property serve as a tempting invitation for rampant in-fill development throughout the community. As the Commission is aware, a major in-fill project was built within the past two years at Capitol Park (aka Potomac Place); the design, shape, size and materials of the building are inconsistent with the surrounding structures, resulting in a truly unfortunate degradation of the integrity of the neighborhood's design. Sadly, the in-fill structure obliterated a park where President Eisenhower hosted a tour for Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev, showcasing the Southwest Urban Renewal project as a demonstration of the progress the United States was making in eliminating slums.

Although there is much that can be done to improve the Southwest community, we remain very concerned that the leadership of the District of Columbia and its agencies are sanctioning the steady destruction of an important piece of American history and urban design. If the proposed development the Commission is considering this evening was in Georgetown, we believe many more questions would be asked about the project and its design. While we do not minimize the history and charm of Georgetown, there are many "Georgetown's" in older cities throughout the United States. However, there really is nothing comparable in size and integrity to the Southwest Urban Renewal area and its Modernist architecture and plan, a bold and audacious public/private partnership that sought to harness contemporary urban planning and design to create a new living environment for working class Americans. The time really is overdue for City leaders to recognize the treasure the neighborhood represents, and the danger it is facing from redevelopment. It would be sad indeed for the current leadership of the Office of Planning and this Zoning Commission to be remembered as the officials who presided over the destruction of this unique and irreplaceable moment in urban planning and architectural history.

With specific regard to the Marina View Towers proposal, Tiber Island Cooperative Homes does not oppose some additional development at the site. The existing surface parking lots are unattractive, and the opportunity to add retail space to the neighborhood is appealing. However, we reject the proposition that the site is appropriate for massive new high-rise apartment buildings lining M Street and K Street. The addition of buildings 2 to 3 stories in height erected over the parking lot would be compatible with the existing pattern of development throughout the neighborhood, with taller buildings (e.g., the I.M. Pei towers) surrounded by lower structures such as townhouses or even low-rise commercial spaces. In our view, such smaller-scale development would preserve the Pei buildings as the centerpiece of the property,

and probably represent a solid improvement to the neighborhood. In addition, this lower-scale development would match the townhouses that line the south side of M Street. We would applaud such a project if it were designed well.

If District planners and this Commission are committed to this ill-advised proposal to allow dramatically increased density on this particular site, we urge the Commission to direct the developer to submit a new PUD proposal that would reconfigure the project in several respects.

The current plan calls for a solid, impenetrable structure lining the north side of M Street. The building would be set back only 15' from the curb, and would rise to 112' in height. In our conversations with the developer, we have been advised that this configuration specifically was urged by the District's Office of Planning. If implemented in this manner at the Marina View Towers site, the result will be a structure completely at odds with the underlying scheme of the existing neighborhood, needlessly restricting views and producing a streetscape that will resemble the mind-numbingly mediocre structures already rising nearby at the Navy Yard. Tiber Island Cooperative will be directly affected by the proposed development, which will block vistas from our buildings that were part of the original Southwest Plan. Very simply, we believe the planning assumptions underlying the proposed Marina View Towers project reflect poor design choices, and should be altered as part of this PUD process.

Generally, if the District is to allow large buildings at this site to be constructed – which we oppose – it would be preferable to shrink the footprint of the buildings above the ground floor level in favor of making the buildings taller. This would be more consistent with the “tower” pattern of the existing neighborhood, and would improve the sight-lines around and through the property. At the proposed height of 112 feet, no one in the neighborhood will be able to see past these buildings anyway. If the buildings are built taller and more compact in their footprint, at least people will be able to see around them better. If the Commission is going to approve a project of the scale proposed, we suggest it would be preferable for the buildings to rise to the maximum 130' height allowed if such increased height would make it possible to reduce significantly the horizontal mass of the buildings along M Street and K Street.

In summary, we believe the following changes need to be made to the proposed PUD:

1. The overall size of the project should be reduced substantially. Structures built over the parking lots on M Street and K Street should be limited to 30' in height.
2. The entire construction along M Street should be set back a minimum of 22' from the curb, per the current proposed design for Waterside Mall. It makes no sense for the visual expanse of M Street to *narrow* as it approaches the river; if anything, the setback of the buildings from the street should *increase* as M Street approaches the river and Arena Stage to provide appropriate cues to pedestrians.
3. At ground level, we do not object to lining M Street with retail and lobby space from “corner to corner,” as proposed by the developer. This would apply to the

first 20' - 30' of height along M Street itself, roughly comparable to the height of the townhouses that line M Street on the south side.

However, if the Commission is going to consider approving construction of high-rise buildings as part of this PUD, the horizontal dimension of the new buildings above 30' should be shortened in favor of adding additional height to the structures. In the "height" vs. "width" debate, Tiber Island believes taller towers with a more-compact floor plan are preferable to a sprawling 112' high wall of building along the street. Taller buildings with a more-compact footprint would improve everyone's ability to see beyond the structures, and would improve the neighborhood's ability to see and experience the Pei structures and the expanded Arena Stage property. In addition, this configuration would be more compatible in design with the existing Southwest neighborhood.

In addition to improving sight lines through the neighborhood, taller and more-compact buildings would offer significant advantages to the developer and the District. Apartments on higher floors produce substantially higher rents, thus increasing the value of the property and increasing the city's property tax revenue. In addition, if the upper floors of the new towers were set back from 6th Street while retaining retail space at the ground level, the corner retail areas of the new buildings along 6th Street could be improved and enlivened significantly by increasing ceiling heights and adding amenities such as rooftop-level dining facing Arena Stage. Reducing the footprint of the new buildings also would help retain sight lines to the river from the residential units in the Pei structures.

4. Approval of the proposed PUD should include a requirement that the design of any new buildings on the site be in a Modernist style compatible with the surrounding community, and subject to review and approval by an independent panel of architects designated by the Commission.

Additionally while Tiber Island's primary reservations about the proposed Marina View Towers project relate to density and design issues, we join with the ANC and other community groups in expressing our concern that existing residents of Marina View Towers be fully protected during the development process.

Before you decide to approve this PUD application, we ask you to consider the modifications which we have suggested here tonight. Thank you.

Attachment:
Southwest Washington, D.C., Urban Renewal Area
Historic American Building Survey HABS DC-856
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior