

Statement of Gregory McCarthy

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Zoning Commission of the District of Columbia

Case #07-08B

October 4, 2012

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Chairman Hood and other members of the Zoning Commission, thank you for the opportunity to testify today in support of the Office of Planning's request to approve application 07-08B to extend the current provision allowing temporary surface parking around Nationals Park for an additional five years.

In 2006 and 2007, this body and a number of public agencies at the local and federal levels, adopted rulings, policies, and practices regarding land use and transportation in anticipation of the opening of Nationals Park. At the time, there was palpable concern about whether the ballpark project was going to be workable from a transportation perspective. Working together, District and federal agencies, the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority, community-based groups in Southwest and Near Southeast, as well as the team implemented plans that have worked well over five baseball seasons at Nationals Park. The dedication, foresight, and commitment of all parties have withstood the test of time, even as the Traffic and Transportation Operations Plan has been adjusted to reflect lessons learned. The end result is an exemplary multimodal system for Nationals Park. We urge you to keep this plan intact by approving a five year extension for limited surface parking around the park.

There are several important factors to keep in mind.

Nationals Park is and will remain a transit-oriented ballpark. The ballpark relies on mass transit to carry one-half of fans attending games and promotes the use of Metrorail, Circulator Bus, bicycles, and water taxis on its website, through media outreach, and, most importantly, by emails and communications directly with fans.

For a minority of fans, mass transit is not a viable or otherwise attractive option. In order to provide options to our fans, especially, our season ticket holders, the team needs to maintain a parking inventory.

Parking lots and garages in the Nationals inventory offer significant transportation planning benefits. Fans who use parking spaces in our inventory are less likely to cause traffic congestion insofar as the team can communicate with them in advance about preferred routes to parking sites. This has allowed us to very successfully keep drivers off local roads and otherwise minimize affects on nearby residents. By arranging parking in advance our fans don't circulate looking for parking, adding to congestion and creating problems for residents and businesses.

As attendance at Nationals Park increases, the capacity of Metrorail will be challenged. Even though WMATA runs extra trains during gametime, wait times for fans are increasing.

Demand for parking will increase. While we expect Metrorail ridership to remain around 50 percent, increased attendance will mean increased demand for parking.

Overtime, the amount of surface parking inventory covered in the zoning order will evaporate as development occurs. While it's likely that the team will seek to secure spaces for gametime parking in the underground garages to be built, it's far from certain that all or even most building owners will be amenable or that the number of underground spaces available will match those in the previous surface lots.

The temporary use of these squares for surface parking has not deterred development or the otherwise highest and best use of the lots in any way. Over 500 licensed spaces on these squares have already been eliminated from the team's parking inventory due to development. Moreover, all our license agreements with lot owners include a provision allowing cancellation in the event owner is ready to develop the property.

Even if the team were able to license spaces in eventual underground garages on these sites, a regular construction cycle would eliminate all on-site parking for three seasons. Since development can occur with relatively little notice, it's important to have a ready inventory of other squares on which to seek additional parking.

The team is not currently seeking to expand its parking inventory, so we've not contacted owners of parcels covered in the zoning order to see if they would even consider future surface parking lots. Upfront costs necessary for conversion to a parking lot and/or other limitations of owners may make the land unavailable for parking. So it's important to not view the number of possible spaces on squares covered by the zoning order as inevitable or even necessarily possible.

Given the relatively short notice that could come with a lot's removal from our parking inventory and the time required to prepare any new lot that might come on line, it's important to have a larger universe of lots to work with than is ever likely to be developed as parking. The fast-paced nature of development around the ballpark will likely ensure that they transition with little notice and quickly thereafter. For this reason, anything short of a full five year extension would adversely affect sound planning and the team's ability to respond quickly enough to developments around the ballpark.

Transportation management for the ballpark is a success. An important success. We urge the Zoning Commission not to remove any assets that will adversely affect current operations or otherwise prevent the team for providing critical amenities to some of its fans. Our temporary use of some parcels as surface parking is certainly not impeding development, the pace of which will pick up soon, causing our parking inventory to shrink. Your extension of the existing zoning provision for another five years will allow these transitions to occur in an orderly fashion.

Thank you.