

**Case No. 07-13
Corcoran/Randall School PUD and Map Amendment**

Thursday, November 8, 2007

TESTIMONY

of

DAVID C. SOBELSOHN

**Advisory Neighborhood Commission 6D
Commissioner 6D02**

ZONING COMMISSION
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EXHIBIT No. 55
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Commissioners and staff, good evening. I am David Sobelsohn, Advisory Neighborhood Commissioner for ANC 6D02. My single-member district includes the site of this project. This project will most directly affect my constituents.

This evening I represent both my own constituents and the ANC on which I serve. Our ANC has a quorum of four. On October 15, 2007, we voted 5-0, with one abstention and one not present, to support the current Planned Unit Development and map amendment, and to appoint me to represent our ANC on this application. We have sent you our resolution.

We support the current P.U.D. & map amendment for several reasons.

First, many of us had problems with the previous design. That design extended part of the new building into the former right-of-way of H Street, SW. Technically that portion of H Street is privately owned. But for years H Street has provided the only vehicle access to the Randall Recreation facilities off South Capitol Street. These facilities include tennis and basketball courts, baseball fields, a playground, a recreation center, and our community's only public swimming pool. A building out on H Street would have made it difficult to drive vehicles—including emergency vehicles—to these recreation facilities. At a Mayor's Agent hearing this summer, one of our commissioners called the H Street build-out "a wart that needs to be removed."

But this project needed more than wart removal. The previous design also included loading docks, on H Street, suitable for 55-foot trucks. Trucks of that length would have blocked traffic on H Street and wreaked havoc with the Delaware Avenue Circle, where the Avenue crosses H Street.

And so the applicants have made additional changes to assure us of continued access along Delaware Avenue and H Street. In particular, the applicants have downsized their loading docks, and pledge that they will never permit docking or unloading by trucks over 40 feet long. Moreover, the applicants have promised, working with the DC Department of Transportation, to convey a permanent public easement on H Street. Only with a permanent public easement on H Street, along with a limit on truck length, would we support this P.U.D.

To be sure, our neighborhood still has some discomfort with this project. Even without a tenth floor, this project will include Southwest's largest apartment building north of I Street. Even without a tenth floor, this project will increase our population by nearly 10%. A tenth floor will make this our neighborhood's tallest apartment building, casting long afternoon shadows over our swimming pool.

Moreover, we remain concerned about traffic flow around this project. Placement of loading docks and garage entry on H Street will require heavy use of H Street to service the project. Yet even with a permanent public easement, H Street will remain partly closed.

It also troubles us that—although not directly involving this project—one of these applicants has made statements and taken legal action that threatens to exacerbate the traffic problems our neighborhood will face next spring, with the opening of the new Washington Nationals baseball stadium.

Nevertheless, we accept the need to assess this set of proposals independent of other projects. We

also accept the claim that this project requires a certain density to make it commercially viable.

Since none of us has training in traffic analysis, we look to the DC Department of Transportation and this Commission to ensure the smooth flow of traffic around the project once completed.

We therefore support the current Planned Unit Development, with a tenth floor and the reconfigured north end of the project, and despite our concerns, as a reasonable trade-off for limiting the size of trucks that can access the project; for continued public access on H Street and Delaware Avenue; and—most important—for the numerous ways this project, on balance, will benefit our community.

For example, the area beside the property, on I Street, currently has old pavement and small ugly shrubs. The applicants have agreed to landscape this as a park, with financial consequences for them if they don't. Creating a park will nicely enhance the setting of the historic Randall School.

The applicants have also promised preferences for our residents in employment and housing, and a substantial contribution to our community-investment fund.

Of course, this project primarily benefits our community in providing a new home for the Corcoran College of Art + Design. But by themselves, students in a building would do little for our neighborhood. And so the Corcoran Gallery of Art has pledged many ways in which the Corcoran and its College will engage artistically with the community. These include:

—arts education, especially sending graduate students to teach in our schools; and providing scholarships for our art teachers, our adults taking art degrees and non-degree arts classes, and our kids attending arts camp; and—

—art for our neighborhood, especially adopting an annual arts project and organizing an annual arts festival; free Corcoran membership for a neighborhood teacher; and providing an open art gallery and open student art space, museum tours and a day of free admission for our residents, and additional benefits for our residents who volunteer at the Corcoran.

The Corcoran has also pledged to erect a sculpture on the Delaware Avenue Circle, and to beautify the construction site, so that this project presages the coming of not just any institution but a school for the arts. The Corcoran will also make Randall available for frequent community meetings.

Because of this community-benefits agreement—Involving serious commitments to our community—we consider this project potentially the most important addition to the cultural life of our neighborhood since Arena Stage moved to Southwest 46 years ago. That's why we support the current Planned Unit Development and map amendment. We urge you to include our community-benefits agreement in any approval of this application.

Thank you