LOFTS AT CHAPIN STREET / BZA HEARING / February 19, 2001

- Good morning my name is Vance M. Gragg and my firm Gragg & Associates is a member of the team that is requesting your approval of a package of zoning variances for a multif-family residential site located in Columbia Heights, ~~a community that is enjoying a surge of residential and commercial investment.~~

- In addition to my firm our team includes Mr. Carlos Perdomo of Keystone Construction, Mr. Chris Donatelli of Donatelli and Klein, and Lee Quill. Each member is actively involved in residential and commercial real estate projects in the District, including developments in the Columbia Heights community.

- In the early summer of 2000 members of the team entered into a contract to purchase the vacant and boarded up Berkshire Apartments at located at 1412 Chapin Street N.W., just north of the intersection of U Street and 14th Avenue, and approximately one block west of Malcom X Park and 16th Street.

- Constructed in 19 the Berkshire Apartments were a story property containing approximately rental units.

- At the time it was developed Chapin Street N.W. was a popular destination for middle to upper class home owners and renters, seeking a location close to 16th Avenue and near the trolley car lines giving them easy access to downtown Washington from the cool climate of Columbia Heights.

- After completing our due diligence which included reports from our contractor and engineer that structurally the building was suitable for renovation, we decided to proceed with buying the property and restoring it to its former grandeur.

- We completed the purchase in late summer of 2000 and immediately begin working with our architect to design the renovation project. As advised by our contractor we also began putting together a plan to shore up the building as the first step in the process.

- Our plans were interrupted in ~~November~~ of 2000 when to our surprise a portion of the building collapsed during a couple of days of severe thunderstorms.

- Immediately following the storms District officials inspected the building and … ~~despite our insistence that the building could be safely shored up and renovated~~ … ordered us to demolish the building.

- We followed the Districts orders and demolished the building spending more than $200,000 in the process.

- Our decision to continue to go forward with creating residential building on the project site and the need to address the impact of having to demolish the Berkshire on our financial investment and development plans is what brings us before the BZA today.

- After the Berkshire was demolished our architects determined that without some zoning variances from the BZA … we would only be able to construct about 14 marketable residential units on the site … or approx. 26 fewer units than were contained in the original Berkshire Apartments.

BZA
Case No. 16669
Exhibit No. 36

Board of Zoning Adjustment
District of Columbia
CASE NO.16669
EXHIBIT NO.36

- Taking into account that a greater number of residential units would be needed to make a new construction project work financially, we decided to seek the zoning variances that will allow us to create the project that is described in your staff report.

- We are seeking variances that will permit us to create 31 new units of residential housing on the Berkshire Apartments site. Our development … which we call the Lofts at Chapin … also includes ~~28~~ (?) 27 parking spaces contained in a garage under the new building.

- Except for the rear and side yard setback variances, the requested variances essentially allow us to construct a project that fits within the original building envelope of the demolished Berkshire Apartments.

- The rear and side yard setback variances afford us the ground level area to create the ~~28~~ 27 space garage, and also allow us to provide improved air circulation and light corridors around the exterior of the new building.

- We want to recognize ~~your~~ Office of Planning staff for diligent and the very professional manner in which they have administered our application. We understand that they have decided to recommend approval of our application and appreciate their judgment.

- Having purchased the Berkshire Apartments last summer and invested additional monies in planning, engineering, architectural and demolition expenses we are desperate to get the project under construction.

- We hope that you will find the requested variances to be reasonable and within the scope of the applicable regulations, and approve them this morning.

- With your approval in hand we will immediately proceed with completing our project financing and move towards breaking ground on the Lofts at Chapin.

- A residential building which we hope will do justice too the legacy of the Berkshire Apartments, and contribute to the overall revitalization of Columbia Heights and the broader resurgence of Washington, D.C.

- Thank you for your patience and we will gladly answer any questions you may have now or later.

- ~~Absent questions Mr. ___ will now present to you ……~~