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Testimony of Sara Green
June 26, 2001, Board of Zoning Adjustment
Case No. 16676 - Application of Washington Hebrew Congregation

Good afternoon. My name is Sara Green, and I have lived at 7106 Piney Branch Road, N.W., for 26 years. My home is near the site you are looking at today, and I consider the1300 block of Missouri Avenue part of my neighborhood.

The historic Military Road School and the Lightfoot home are places I pass several times a week. I have always loved these buildings. They are architectural gems with valuable links to important, but little-known elements of our city's history. They, along with the national park land and the Washington Hebrew Congregation property, are precious resources for everyone in the community, and they deserve respect -- much more than they are receiving from Poretsky Builders and the D.C. Office of Planning.

Please deny this proposal. At the very minimum you need to delay action on it -- again. Here are several compelling reasons.

1. <u>The developer has not worked with the community fairly and openly, despite the BZA's request in March.</u>

During your March hearing, I heard BZA members repeatedly ask the developer to work closely with the community. And, several BZA members told the developer his submissions were incomplete and confusing. They were incomplete again when Mr. Poretsky went before ANC 4A in June.

There were no exterior designs, and other important information, including traffic studies, was not presented at the 4A public hearing. And these items were not submitted to the BZA file for public review as late as June 21 -- five days before this hearing.

I attended ANC 4A's public hearing and also spent time in your office on June 21 in an attempt to learn about this project. I've been told this material is normally on file for public review 14 days before the hearing. But much of what I needed to see, including exterior renderings of the proposed townhouses, was missing.

There is no excuse. Mr. Poretsky knew ANC 4A's meeting date in March and he knew what information he needed to show the community and when he needed to do it. He failed to do so.

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2. <u>These townhouses need to be designed to compliment and blend with the Lightfoot Family's Victorian home and with the historic Military Road School.</u>

Mr. Poretsky has never noted that architectural compatibility was ever considered. When I asked about it at the 4A hearing Mr. Poretsky simply said that both his townhouses and the school were made of brick. Yet, the Lightfoot home, the closest to the applicant's property, is frame, not brick.

Of course, new buildings don't have to look like their neighbors and they don't have to look "old." But, as you know, a skilled and educated architect can make a starkly modern building work with its older neighbors by considering such things as height, shape, roof lines, materials, color, and landscaping and buffering. I am asking you to look at these townhouses and consider whether any of these issues were considered here.

No one has seen any recent renderings. The designs submitted at the March hearing did not address any of these elements. They were the simplest kind of cookie-cutter-style brick townhouse, much like what you see off I-270 in Germantown. They were not appropriate for this site.

3. <u>Fire and emergency vehicle access remain serious problems.</u>

The testimony at the March BZA hearing noted that fire and emergency truck access is an issue. Fortunately, several BZA members noticed the problem and asked Mr. Poretsky to make certain it is resolved.

Earlier this month, the developer told ANC 4A they had solved the emergency vehicle problem. However, they are relying on the use of Rock Creek Ford Road, a historic road that is not suitable for heavy use. (Note photographs submitted with this testimony.)

Again, I want to thank the Board of Zoning Adjustment for caring about the community's right to know and its role in the design of this project. Unfortunately, Mr. Poretsky did not act on your concerns. Please do not approve this project today.

There are other alternatives for this property and many other area residents who want to see it saved for future generations. This is a treasure that should not be lost.