R O G E R K L E W I S f a i a
architecture & planning 5034 ½ Dana Place, NW Washington DC 016 tel: 202-363-0220
fx: 202-686-8603
professor University of Maryland School of Architecture, College Park, MD 20742 tel: 301-405-6289
fx: 301-314-9583
columnist The Washington Post rogershome@aol.com

July 19, 2001

Mrs. Sheila Cross Reid, Chairperson
Board of Zoning Adjustment
441 4th Street, NW, Room 220 South
Washington, DC 20001

Re: 500 New Jersey Avenue, NW -- BZA Application No. 16744

Dear Mrs. Reid and members of the Board of Zoning Adjustment:

I am writing to enthusiastically advocate favorable BZA action on the above-referenced application for zoning variances. My support is based not only on the appropriateness of the project from an urban design perspective, but also on two fundamental zoning principles. First, the ultimate goal of zoning is to ensure that the interests of the public are duly served and protected. Second, the zoning variance process recognizes that across-the-board imposition and enforcement of uniform zoning regulations, with specific, quantitative limits, may not always be in the best interest of the public and city.

Zoning ordinances are necessarily written for "typical" site conditions and assume that most parcels fall within a normative range of size, configuration, topography, soil characteristics and setting. But some parcels lie outside this range, most often because of unusual geometry and constraining dimensions. Thus applying "normal" rules of zoning can make development of such parcels very difficult, perhaps even unfeasible aesthetically, technically and economically. The small, triangular parcel at 500 New Jersey Avenue is clearly such a unique site. It is also unique because of its special location within the city, its relationship to one of L'Enfant's axial avenues radiating from the U.S. Capitol building, and its high-density context of hotels and office buildings.

The iconic, landmark building Mr. Hellman proposes responds appropriately to this context. Its overall mass and height are fitting and ensure dramatic open spaces and enhanced streetscape. Putting density where adequate public infrastructure can support it is unquestionably a beneficial manifestation of "smart growth" in action. Indeed, to underdevelop this urban site would, in fact, be contrary to the public interest and contrary to good urban design principles.

Jay Hellman has a compelling vision for revitalizing America's capital city in the age of the computer, and New Jersey Avenue, NW, from the Capitol to Massachusetts Avenue, is his "laboratory." The building he proposes for this small but important site is the centerpiece of this creative urban vision. Accordingly, I urge you to approve the needed variances so the project can proceed in the near future.

Respectfully submitted,

Roger K. Lewis, FAIA

BZA
Case No. 16744
Exhibit No. 55

Board of Zoning Adjustment
District of Columbia
CASE NO.16744
EXHIBIT NO.55