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Testimony

Before the District of Columbia
Board of Zoning Adjustment
Presented by Dr. Eugene W. Matthews
Senior Pastor
Asbury United Methodist Church
October 30, 2001

Re: Application #16778

Mr. Chairman and members of the Board of Zoning Adjustment, thank you for allowing me to provide testimony on behalf of the members of Asbury United Methodist Church. I am senior pastor of Asbury and I am joined here today by several members of our congregation. A written copy of my testimony has been provided to the clerk for the record.

Asbury has been in ministry on the corners of 11th and K Streets, N.W. for more than 165 years. Our congregation has over 1,600 members, individuals and families who are residents of the District of Columbia and neighboring communities in Maryland and Virginia.

Asbury has been richly blessed with a longstanding history of outreach ministries in the downtown area and surrounding neighborhoods. While other congregations have chosen to leave the District, expressing concern over issues such as space for expansion, parking, etc., the members of Asbury, during a church-wide meeting earlier this year, formally recommitted its commitment to remain in ministry at our current location in downtown Washington.

We do so, not without concern about the impact of the growth all around us. Rather we believe that the struggle of our ancestors to leave the balconies of what is today Foundry United Methodist Church has prepared us and the grace of God fortifies us to labor and make disciples from our current location, despite the difficulties we face. The limited availability of space and the exorbitant cost of property in the area constrains the expansion of our ministries, the dearth of parking inhibits the ability of our members to participate in weekday services and activities and I could go with a litany of problems

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faced by a church trying to be in ministry in a downtown location. However, our faith dictates that we persevere as God leads us and we believe God is leading us to remain firmly planted on the corners of 11th and K Streets.

In addition to providing a place of worship for our members, Asbury regularly opens its doors to tourists visiting the District. We offer a range of ministries and services, not only to our members, but also to people or all ages, in and around downtown Washington, DC. Some of the ministries operated from our location at 926 Eleventh Street, N.W. include a food pantry, a regularly scheduled neighborhood breakfast for homeless men and women, a Saturday Christian School for children and youth and a child development center.

As you might imagine, our members are very concerned about the potential impact of the development and construction proposed by 1108 K Street Associates. Experiences of neighboring congregations lead us to be worried about the effect of nearby construction on the structural integrity of our building and our valuable stained glass windows. We are pleased that in recent meetings, initiated by Asbury, the developers have expressed sensitivity with regard to these issues.

The developers indicated during the meeting that members of their construction team have experience working on projects with similar concerns. I am pleased to share with you that the developers have preliminarily agreed to review our building and to document the church's structure through video tape, photos and/or narrative data, with the ultimate goal of assuring us that they will be responsible for any repairs necessary as a result of damages caused by construction. We are also pleased that the developers are sensitive to our concerns relative to construction noise that might interrupt mid-week services and other activities during the week. Further, we have been assured that there will be no construction activity on Sunday during our worship hours. Asbury would request that if this application is approved, that the concessions promised by the applicants be a condition of the Board of Zoning Adjustment's Order.

We are aware of the fact that at one time the above referenced property was the site of a gasoline station. We are very concerned and would request that prior to development, this property be subject to stringent environmental review and remediation as necessary. Further, we would request the official results of the soil contamination inspection reports on the property at 1108 K Street to ensure that the property is in compliance with approved environmental regulations.

The members of Asbury believe that the presence of a viable religious institution, with thriving ministries adds immensely to the appeal of our downtown corridor. We develop A understand that city officials must balance competing interests in trying to ~~vibrant~~ and livable city. I stand before you today, to ask on behalf of the members of Asbury, that you be directed not only by the desire to bring development to downtown Washington, but also by the human and spiritual needs of the people who live here and those who will visit our great city.

The anticipated development, not just in our square but all around us, will have a decided effect on our ability to be in ministry. In addition to the concerns raised earlier in my testimony, we are very anxious about how our already inadequate parking situation will be further affected by the brisk development in our corridor.

We want to provide expanded services and reach more people with our ministries. We understand fully the obstacles we face, but we are committed and we believe that it is not luck, but God and God alone who has kept us in our current location for more than 165 years. We ask that as you remember Asbury and the needs of people, needs that can not be measured in terms of development or the economy, as you deliberate and make decisions.

As a congregation we pray, without ceasing, for God's direction and strength. You and the work that you do are deeply embedded in our prayers.

Again, I would like to thank you, Mr. Chairman, and the Committee for allowing me to speak with you today. I would be happy to attempt to answer any questions or hear any comments that you might have at this point. Thank you and may God bless each of you.