17232

February 8, 2005

Good afternoon.

My name is Anne Theisen. I am ANC Commissioner for Single Member District 1A05, the SMD in which the development considered today is located. I am also the former Chair and Secretary and one of the founding members of the Monroe Street Association, a very active neighborhood association. Most importantly, I am a ten-year resident of Columbia Heights, and it is in this capacity that I appear before you today.

When I first moved into Columbia Heights fully one third of the homes on my street were vacant or abandoned. Certainly, within Columbia Heights, Monroe Street was not unique in this aspect. Even though parking was permitted on only one side of our street, and only half the residents had off street spaces available, my husband and I had no trouble parking our two vehicles on the street at any time; in fact, we were, usually able to park right in front of our house.

Over the years, as a result of the opening of the Metro station and the new potential for development, Columbia Heights became a more popular community, and many (though not all) of those empty homes have been filled. Many of these new residents came with vehicles. In addition, Columbia Heights apartment buildings are also more likely to have residents who own cars, and many of these old buildings do not have off-street parking available. As a result, resident parking in the community has almost become a competitive sport, and heaven forbid you might want to have a guest drive over to visit. On Monroe Street, we struggled to have parking reinstated to both sides of the street. Today, those of us who have alley access would not dream of parking on the street, thereby taking a space from one of our neighbors without off-street parking.

I give you this history, because the prospect of new development without adequate parking will again change the tenor of our community. While the residents of Columbia Heights are certainly complaining about today's lack of available parking for residents, we have not yet reached the saturation point that exists in Adams Morgan, Dupont Circle, or Georgetown. The parking difficulties in these communities lie in the fact that homes are all occupied and there is a commercial draw to the area. Indeed, Georgetown and Adams Morgan saw fit to add parking garages when the problem became overwhelming.

In Columbia Heights, we still have empty homes and many changes coming. There are additional high-density residences being planned. Many single-family homes are being converted into multiple condominium units. There are new commercial and business developments, which will be breaking ground soon. A new theatre has opened, and a new dance school will soon arrive. There is room for growth for the small business that line 14th Street, 11th Street, and Park Road and Irving Street. But there is no more vacant land on which parking can be placed.

If we don't ensure, now, that adequate parking is installed, we will not have another chance. There is not another location in Columbia Heights that will be available for an additional parking lot or parking garage somewhere down the line. We must be certain that the spaces we build today will be adequate for the growth Columbia Heights will be experiencing over the next decade and beyond.

As I mentioned at the beginning of my testimony, I am appearing before you as a concerned resident of Columbia Heights, but I also mentioned my other community affiliations. As a long time member of the Monroe Street Association, and as a member of the ANC, I have had and continue to have many people share their parking concerns with me. Indeed, because the DC/USA development is located in my single member district and Monroe Street is only one block north of this proposed development, I am in frequent contact with those residents who will be most affected by the foreseeable increase in traffic and parking difficulties. I am not alone in my concern. Some of these residents have told me that an increase parking difficulties is an issue that could cause them to move to a different neighborhood.

On the other hand, there is certainly strong support for seeing the DC/USA development completed. Columbia Heights has existed with these empty lots for far too long. But the question of parking seems to be able to make or break this project, and this seems very wrong. It is confusing, to say the least, to hear that the city determined the amount or parking necessary to support this development, assumed the responsibility of financing the construction and running the operation of the garage, and then said that it wasn't going to fund the number of spaces it originally said were needed. I agree with the earlier determination of the city. I believe that a healthy Columbia Heights needs the larger parking garage.

I urge the Board to deny this variance and maintain the level of parking presently planned in order to ensure that the parking needs of the broader Columbia Heights community are met with the completion of this development and well into the future.

Thank you.

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