



February 23, 2005

Mr. Geoffrey Griffis
Chair
Board of Zoning Adjustment
441 4th Street, NW
Suite 210-S
Washington, DC 20001

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RE: Appeal #17285
Hearing Date: March 1, 2005

Dear Mr. Griffis:

I am writing to you to express the Sierra Club's serious concerns about the environmental impacts to Wesley Heights Park resulting from the construction of a massive walled structure behind the residence at 4825 Dexter Terrace, N.W.

As one of the oldest and largest environmental organizations, the Sierra Club has more than 750,000 members across the country, including more than 3,000 living in Washington, D.C. The Sierra Club has been instrumental in the creation and protection of numerous national parks across the country. Washington, D.C. is blessed with thousands of acres of national parkland, including the entire Rock Creek National Park system, of which Wesley Heights Park is a part, and the Washington, D.C. Chapter upholds this distinguished tradition by standing up against development and other encroachments that threaten these precious parks.

We are aware that recent measurements taken by the National Park Service, which owns and manages the parkland on the public's behalf, indicate that the walled structure is located within several feet of the Wesley Heights Park boundary and that elements of the structure are located within the boundaries of the park itself. Regardless of whether the structure is located on or very near national parkland, we are very concerned by the construction of such a tall and massive walled structure so close to national parkland. The structure towers over the parkland, intruding on the scenic forested landscape, and casting a shadow over plant life in the park. Such close proximity to national parkland is incompatible with the preservation of parks for public use and enjoyment and protection of the natural environment.

BZA

Case No. 17285
Exhibit No. 30

Board of Zoning Adjustment
District of Columbia
CASE NO. 17285
EXHIBIT NO. 30

We are particularly concerned that the presence of the walled structure in this location is permitting concentrated stormwater runoff and sediment to flow into the valley, causing significant erosion within Wesley Heights Park and adversely affecting water quality in the stream below. On several occasions, I have heard Rock Creek National Park Superintendent Adrienne Coleman express concerns that the park is constantly being “dumped on,” with impervious surfaces of surrounding development sending polluted stormwater runoff into Rock Creek and its tributaries, adversely affecting water quality. This structure seems like a particularly egregious example of a development project that significantly affects water quality on national parkland.

We are also very troubled by reports that in preparation for construction of the walled structure, numerous trees were cut down, adversely affecting national parkland. We understand that some trees located on the property in question were permitted to fall into Wesley Heights Park, possibly harming trees located on national parkland. And it has been alleged that trees located within the boundaries of the park may have been cut down illegally.

Finally, we are rather concerned that if not properly constructed or maintained, this structure could collapse, sending its bricks and large quantities of fill material spilling into Wesley Heights Park and causing calamitous and irreversible damage to irreplaceable national parkland.

For the reasons noted above, we believe that it is inappropriate to allow such a structure to be constructed so close to national parkland and that permitting it to remain in place would set a dangerous precedent that would lead to similarly inappropriate development projects bordering national parkland in the future. We urge you to overturn the decision to grant a building permit purporting to allow construction of this structure and to order the structure’s removal and restoration of the area in a manner that will not adversely affect Wesley Heights Park.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "J. E. Broehm". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Jason E. Broehm
Chair

cc: Patrick J. Carome
 Richard L. Aguglia