COUNCIL OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
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May 24, 2005

Geoffrey Griffis
Board of Zoning Adjustment
441 4th Street, NW
Suite 210
Washington, DC 20001

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2005 MAY 24 AM 10:15

Re: BZA Application #17304 4500 Benning Road, NE

Dear Chairperson Griffis:

This letter is written in regard to the above-listed case involving the application to construct a five-story office building for the use of Court Services and Offender Supervision Agency (CSOSA). More specifically, I write to request that you postpone the continuation of this hearing, scheduled for Tuesday, May 24, 2005, for 30-60 days.

Over the past week, I have received from Ward 7 residents, including those residing within 200 radial feet of the subject property, hundreds of signatures and numerous letters lodging opposition to the construction of this proposed building. Beyond this, and most troubling, I have received sworn, signed affidavits from 17 residents who live within 200 radial feet of the proposed site and who indicate they never received notification of this hearing and the proposed action to construct the CSOSA Building. In addition, on Friday, May 20th , I received a telephone call from Doyle Mitchell, President of Industrial Bank of Washington whose branch is within 200 feet of the subject property, to indicate he, too, was never notified.

A project of this magnitude should not be decided in this kind of climate. Construction of this building will have a material impact on the future of that area of Ward 7 for the foreseeable future. As CSOSA itself has stated, there are likely to be 400-500 ex-offenders coming to the building each day for services. A full opportunity should be given to all within the prescribed radius, as well as those in the surrounding area to completely understand the intended services. I have concluded this has not occurred.

In February, the developers of the project, along with CSOSA, requested an opportunity to meet and brief me on this project. That meeting was held on February 28th. During this meeting, I discovered that a BZA hearing was scheduled for April 19th, just a few weeks hence. Pursuant to my inquiry regarding with whom in the community this project had been discussed, I discovered that very few organizations and individuals had been consulted about this impending construction. In the aftermath, stepped up efforts were initiated. However, it is clear to me, based on conversations over the past few days that there still are many who have not been reached. Moreover, there are a significant number of people who have asserted through a sworn affidavit that they were not even notified of the BZA hearing.

BZA
Case No. 17304
Exhibit No. 57

Board of Zoning Adjustment
District of Columbia
CASE NO.17304
EXHIBIT NO. 57

This project has engendered an enormous amount of opposition, not just because of what is proposed, but also due to a flawed communications process that has left many affected residents in the dark or with incomplete information. In fact, in one meeting, my position was completely and blatantly mischaracterized as supportive of the project by one of the lead proponents. I have never indicated that to anyone. The manner in which the communication about this project has been handled is simply unfair, unacceptable and unworkable.

I have spoken with representatives of those proposing to construct this building to request that they voluntarily seek a postponement in order to provide a deserving community the opportunity to be heard and advance its reasoned position on this issue. Much planning is afoot in Ward 7 around housing, health care, economic development, public safety, education and constituent engagement in determining, as well as crafting the future of this Ward. Frankly, the citizens of Ward 7 are entitled to know how this building and service contributes to realization of a vision that addresses the key components of daily life.

In sum, the Ward deserves an opportunity to weigh in fully and completely on those initiatives that affect the quality of life and our future. To be sure, in this instance that has not occurred.

There is a long-standing, oft-used, but hardly time-worn adage that the "means should justify the end." Clearly, the process should markedly contribute to the outcome. The citizens of Ward 7 deserve better than what has occurred thus far.

For the reasons cited previously, I fervently request that you postpone further consideration of this matter for 30-60 days. In the absence of such postponement, I must lodge my unequivocal opposition to this application.

Sincerely yours,

Vincent C. Gray
Councilmember - Ward 7