TESTIMONY OF

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BEFORE THE BOARD OF ZONING ADJUSTMENT

OCTOBER 11, 2005

Good Afternoon. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today before the Board of Zoning Adjustment. Mr. Chairman, and distinguished members of the Board, I am Kimberley Flowers, the Director of the DC Department of Parks and Recreation. I'm here to discuss the Department of Parks and Recreation's Columbia Heights Community Center (the Center) at 15th and Girard Streets, NW. I will talk about the importance of the Center and the good it will serve for our neighbors. The Center, is on pace with the development of the 14th Street corridor. There are homes, stores, a new high school and renovated middle school being developed. The presence of these, build a strong community, and the Department of Parks and Recreation is proud to play a role. We are

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prepared to meet the needs of the growing community by ensuring that the Center is properly staffed through out the day, and we provide programs that will improve the quality of life for neighborhood residents by providing access to a state of the art recreational facility within walking distance of their homes. Over the past several years, the plan for the proposed Center was developed with the direct participation and guidance of the community.

We will include a myriad of programs specific to the needs of the Columbia Heights Community. Many of these programs will take place in our gymnasium. A gymnasium at a DPR property is not your "regular" gymnasium. It serves as a runway for fashion shows, a track for our senior walking program, a stage for drama programs, and a showcase for many other cultural arts and learning programs. It is the ballroom for special community events, the welcoming center for children's holiday parties, and the indoor playground in case of rain. We will offer many activities in our spacious gymnasium, including a full complement of basketball and volleyball for all ages. Basketball is

often the draw to get teenagers into our many facilities, but we will have many other offerings for them.

We will have educational offerings, arts and crafts, ceramics, health and wellness classes, nutrition, as well as conflict resolution skills and peer counseling programs. There will be Head Start child care for ages 2-5, and a food program as well. We will have programs for seniors, and we plan to expand our multi-generational program that joins seniors and young people for exciting experiences.

The center will be a haven for the more than 800 Bell Multi-Cultural High School students, and the 400 Lincoln Middle School students that will attend school in the area.

It has been proven that community centers that promote programs for all ages have a direct correlation in the reduction of crime. We will be creating a pilot program that will test the success of innovative programming for disconnected youth through the use of the sound studio

that will be included in the center and the full kitchen that will support our culinary arts program. The use of this site as an "educational incubator" is groundbreaking.

The Columbia Heights Community Center will be the most culturally diverse center in the District of Columbia. We see this center as a beacon for this area and will bring together the cultural diversity reflected in the neighborhood.

The building is also going to be silver certified by LEED- (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design). This status is granted by reducing pavement in the area, and creating more green space to provide an environmentally friendly atmosphere. The Department of Parks and Recreation is excited about this and as such, the testimony focuses on the strength in programming, and the good that this center will serve. However, the reason we are here is to request some minor relief from this Board in order to facilitate the proposed community center, which can meet and exceed the growing community's needs. I will yield to our

capable architectural team to cover the specific code requirements. I am sure that after that testimony, this Board will be prepared to render a decision that will make the community center possible and support the community.

Of specific interest today, are the variances we are requesting. We will need a height variance for the programs I have referenced earlier in my testimony, and the gymnasium that will be the host site for those activities. It is necessary for the ceiling to be higher to accommodate the very active play of the venue.

Parking is always a challenge in Columbia Heights, with the on-going development of the community, which is why we offer our parking lot three blocks to the north to accommodate the needs of the staff, others. We encourage pedestrian traffic to the facility. As a parks department interested in serving the needs of the community, we will encourage those that must drive to use the lot at our headquarters, and all others, public transportation. We anticipate the majority of enrollees will walk

from their homes. This is designed to be a pedestrian facility. Because this building will abut our public park, in an effort to maximize recreational activities, we need the additional building space to accommodate after-school programs and opportunities for adolescence in a safe and secure indoor environment. The abutting green space will be used for daytime activities predominantly for younger children.

Once again I want to thank you for the opportunity to come before you today to share this testimony. I look forward to your positive response.

Thank you.