

February 28, 2017

Board of Zoning Adjustment
Attn: Frederick Hill, Chairman
441 4th St NW, Suite 210S
Washington, DC 20001

Case 19452

Dear Chairman Hill and members of the Board of Zoning Adjustment,

I am a resident and homeowner in SMD 5B03, and I oppose the special exceptions and variances requested by the DC Department of General Services (DGS) in Case 19452 for the proposed homeless shelter at 1700 Rhode Island Avenue NE.

I have attended the majority of the meetings open to the public regarding the design plans for this shelter, and I am deeply disappointed in the lack of community input allowed by DGS in the design and implementation of this shelter. In particular, DGS has been dismissive of any attempt at discussion by community members on alternatives to this plan that address both programmatic needs and the community's concerns. Each meeting has focused on reiterating their plans rather than demonstrating consideration of meaningful contributions from the community.

In particular, DGS has dismissed questions regarding:

- Purchase of the adjacent lot in order to build a secondary building, reduce building height, add parking space, and provide adequate loading zone. In the February 16, 2017 SMD 5B03 meeting where representatives of DGS presented their plans to our community, the planning group was asked by me to think outside the box and consider options such as purchase of the adjacent lot because the current plans are so compromising of the needs of the community and the homeless. Kristy Greenwald, Director of DC's Interagency Council on Homelessness had the only response of the group, which was, "It [the Project as currently proposed] is actually satisfying our needs for this facility. It is. That's all I can say." This is clear demonstration that their focus has been only on their programmatic needs and not the needs of the surrounding community.
- Creating a smaller shelter at this site and choosing another site within the neighborhood to house the remaining families.
- Investigation of other eligible city properties in Ward 5 that may serve as a better location for the extensive program requirements of this project.

Clearly, DGS has failed to prove that these variances and special exceptions are the only option for meeting their programmatic requirements and creating adequate housing for our homeless families. This is shortsighted and detrimental to the thoughtful development of our corridor. Upholding zoning regulations for this site will not stop the city from creating adequate housing for our homeless. It will merely provide the direct neighbors protection from obtrusive development plans and hold the city to the appropriate development standard.

DGS continues to reiterate that these variances and special exceptions are necessary in order to accomplish the project goals of housing the homeless; however, this is false. On May 27, 2016, Mayor Muriel Bowser addressed Chairman Mendelson in a letter regarding the "Constrained Site (Ward 5)", stating that, "Our initial analysis projects that it will deliver below the desired 50 units. We recognize that this is the Ward 5 Councilmember's favored site and to

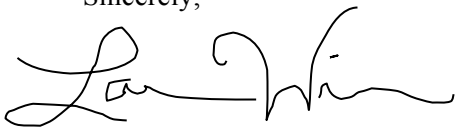
accommodate that preference we need greater flexibility in the remaining wards.” Furthermore, Councilmember McDuffie, who has been credited as choosing this site as his favored site, has urged Directors Gillis and Zeilinger in an email on January 18, 2017 to “expend every resource available to come up with a creative way of reducing the height of the building to something more manageable for its neighbors.” It is clear that those directly responsible for the Homeward DC project and this site selection intend a smaller, more appropriately sized shelter on this site and flexibility within the other wards to welcome the families this site cannot accommodate. This is evidenced by the language in DC Bill B21-0620 that designates this site to contain “up to 50 DC General Family Shelter Replacement Units”, rather than a strict requirement of 50 units in the facility.

These comments from our officials have been ignored by DGS, which is demonstrated by their demand that the site significantly break zoning code and overwhelm the neighboring homes with massive height, lack of parking, lack of loading space, and a hefty increase in density. This will directly impact the closest neighbors, of who include senior citizens, those with debilitating medical conditions, and many respected members of our community. These residents are the casualties that DGS negates as having no value in comparison to their Project, and they are the voices DGS ignores when claiming “there is substantive community support for the Project” in their Response to the Pre-Hearing Statement of Citizens for Responsible Options.

I have a keen respect for the zoning laws that have been established to guide thoughtful growth in our city. Furthermore, I have a high regard for the city’s Comprehensive Plan and Upper Northeast Area Element. These plans, as well as the esteemed opinion of the U.S. Commission of Fine Arts, help guide the balancing of the preservation of family-oriented neighborhoods and the increasing development needs of our growing city. My hope is that these plans and expert opinion will not be hastily disregarded when considering the special exceptions and variances that are now currently before the Board. The current plans for this shelter are discordant with the expert opinion of the U.S. Commission of Fine Arts and the thoughtful planning in our Comprehensive Plan.

Thank you for your thoughtful review of the special exceptions and variances before you. I hope you will join me in the opinion that we can do better on this project, and that you will reject the request for these substantial special exceptions and variances.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Lauren Wiesner". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "L" and a distinct "W".

Lauren Wiesner
1918 Lawrence St NE