

Cochran, Patricia (DCOZ)

**From:** Deborah Ziska <deborah@ziskacomm.com>  
**Sent:** Monday, October 7, 2024 10:11 PM  
**To:** DCOZ - BZA Submissions (DCOZ)  
**Cc:** Nigro, Rachelle (SMD 2G06)  
**Subject:** Written Testimony in Opposition: Case 21177 District of Columbia Department of General Services”

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Dear Chairman Hill and Board Members,

I urge the Board of Zoning Adjustment to deny the special exception relief sought by the District of Columbia Department of General Services for the proposed temporary relocation of the Central Cell Block to 501 New York Ave NW.

My name is Deborah Ziska and I am a second-generation native Washingtonian. In 2000, I purchased a home in the Historic Neighborhood of Mount Vernon Square. I have poured hundreds of thousands of hard- earned dollars into renovating my house, built in 1876, that I purchased in 2000, back in the days of dodging drug dealers and prostitutes amid many vacant properties on the 400 block of M Street NW. With many other neighbors, we have worked hard over the decades with former city administrations to make our neighborhood a highly desirable place to live for a diverse population, including families with babies and young children and dogs.

My property value, something I will depend on later in my retirement, has accordingly increased, while, until recently, crime had decreased. Our safety is once again compromised, worse than it was in the days of the drug dealers and it will further be compromised with the relocation of the Central Cell Block to 501 New York Ave. NW, just two blocks from my home.

Let's start with people the Mayor worries about--convention-goers attending events just one block from 501 NY Ave. A lot of them walk back and forth to hotels and go to restaurants on the other side of the proposed Central Cell Block. What an impression that will make on the people going to Auto Show, Comic Con celebrations, and NATO Summits! And what about the developers such as Boston Properties, right across the street? They also testified against the relocation of the Central Cell Block to 501 NY Ave NW.

In the past couple of years, my car was shot with three bullets while in front of my neighbor's house and I was told that I saved a young man's life when I ran out of my house waving my iPhone and screaming while he was being held up at gunpoint. That's just what happened to me over the last couple of years, not counting the shootings around and near my block. We are working hard with our ANC to have a safer community but the Bowser administration is not helping much.

My biggest worry is not my property value. My biggest worry is community safety. The staging of vans with detainees around our neighborhood will frequently be necessary since only one van can fit into the carport at a time. If they can escape into the neighborhood, they will try, like the detainee at GW Hospital s couple of years ago. They will be sitting in vans in front of homes with children and seniors like me.

The potential release of detainees into the community will be dangerous to all of us but particularly to the toddlers of the Bambini Child Care Center just across Sixth Street NW and that is causing great distress among parents and staff. The proposed cell block is also just feet from residential property directly behind it that is owned by the United House of Prayer.

The construction of the Central Cell Block, necessitating special exception relief, will detrimentally, adversely, and significantly impact the neighboring properties in direct violation of the Zoning Regulations and Maps. The substantial increase in cells and detainees will lead to heightened traffic, noise, and security concerns, including, but not limited to:

- Disruptions from the facility's 24/7 operations due to six police forces transporting detainees to the facility.
- Noise pollution from potentially over eighty detainees and from increased activity at the building.
- Increased traffic from police, employees, vendors, etc., leading to congestion.

The proposed temporary relocation of the Central Cell Block to 501 New York Avenue, N.W., will have a direct, significant, and adverse effect on all of the residents, business owners, and community organizations nearby. This neighborhood has undergone transformation over decades from a state of neglect, characterized by parking lots and dilapidated houses, to a vibrant area with mixed-use residential developments.

We are asking that this Project not be allowed to undo that progress and that DGS be directed to find a more appropriate and less impactful location.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,  
Deborah Ziska