COMMITTEE of 100 on the FEDERAL CITY

Subcommittee on Parks and the Environment

July 1, 2002

Carol Mitten, Chair
Zoning Commission of the District of Columbia
441 4th St. NW, Suite 210
Washington, DC 20001

Re: Case #02-15

Dear Ms. Mitten:

The Subcommittee on Parks and Environment of the Committee of 100 wishes to express our opposition to the text amendment to 11 DCMR providing matter-of-right use in the R-1 Zone for public park and recreational uses.

We believe the proposed regulations go much too far in allowing the DC Department of Parks and Recreation to develop new facilities and to raze and reconstruct or expand existing facilities in our city's parks and recreation areas. Among other things, the text amendment would allow developments of up to 40 feet high covering 60 percent of "lot occupancy" in public parks and recreation areas as a "matter of right." For most park developments, this would effectively curtail meaningful citizen input and negate the need for further review and approval by other city agencies involved in zoning and historic preservation.

Indeed, we were surprised to learn that the Zoning Commission took action last February, with no notice to the public, to approve new "emergency" regulations that could have such a sweeping effect on parks and their surrounding neighborhoods throughout the District.

We are fundamentally troubled by the concept of overlaying the residential zoning on public parks and recreation area facilities. Public parks and recreation areas have unique characteristics of ecology, typography, history and uses that do not fit with the usual residential zoning categories. They need to be considered on a case-by-case basis. Some parks are surrounded by different zones. As an analogy, imagine if Central Park in New York City were developed in conformance to the surrounding zoning. Also, what about the situation where parks are adjacent to schools?

Furthermore, many of the existing structures would qualify for historic landmark status but have not as yet been designated by the DC Historic Preservation Office. Size is another factor. Certainly the concept of 60 percent lot occupancy does not fit most of the larger parks and recreation areas in the District. And a 40-foot (e.g. 4 stories high) structure would dwarf many of our smaller parks.

ZONING COMMISSION
District of Columbia
Case No. 02-15
Exhibit
ZONING COMMISSION
District of Columbia
CASE NO.02-15
EXHIBIT NO.21

We believe that a more comprehensive approach is needed. The DC Department of Parks and Recreation first of all needs a comprehensive plan that is developed with public input and support for the use of its parks and recreation facilities. Certainly this should be done before any "matter of right" zoning is approved. These are public facilities paid for with public funds, and the public has a right to more information about how they are to be managed and developed.

The current Comprehensive Plan for DC is insufficient to deal with these issues and does not provide sufficient guidance to the Zoning Commission to make decisions relating to the zoning of our public parks and recreation areas.

We therefore recommend the following:

(1) Public Parks and Recreation Area facilities should **not** be subject to traditional zoning classifications. If the DC Council's prior legislation requires them to be zoned, then they should have their own park and recreation zoning classification.

(2) Other than renovations of existing structures, any new construction or significant expansions of existing facilities should continue to be considered on an individual basis as a variance.

(3) Substantial renovations or expansions of existing structures should be reviewed by the DC Historic Preservation Office to determine whether the structures are eligible for the DC Landmarks List; if they are, any proposed changes to them should be reviewed and approved by the DC Historic Preservation Review Board.

Thank you for the opportunity to express our views.

Sincerely,



Loretta Neumann, Chair
Subcommittee on Parks and Environment
Committee of 100 on the Federal City