RECEIVED
D.C. OFFICE OF ZONING
2003 FEB -4 PM 4:00

February 1, 2003

Ms. Jerrily Kress, Director
Office of Zoning
441 4th Street, NW, Suite 210
Washington, DC 20001

Re: Case Number 02-38, PUD Application for the Waterfront project (formerly Waterside Mall)

Dear Ms. Kress:

I have lived in Southwest since 1986 at Harbour Square, a 447 unit cooperative one block south of the Waterfront project. I support, in its entirety, the Waterfront project as proposed by the Forest City Enterprises and The Kaempfer Company. However, this letter is to apprise you and your office that results from a survey conducted by the Southwest Neighborhood Association (SWNA) to argue against reopening 4th Street, SW is not fully representative of the Southwest community.

SWNA is a well-established civic association in southwest DC and has been an important contributor to the welfare of the Southwest area. Although well intended, SWNA developed and administered a questionnaire that violated generally accepted survey design principals. As a consequence, their survey data are biased and unrepresentative of Southwest residents. I make these assertions based on a 27-year career spent as a survey methodologist with the federal government, first with the Census Bureau and then with the General Accounting Office. During my career I have surveyed tens of thousands of people in the general public; public and private organizations; and state and federal agencies. These surveys have included simple random samples to complex stratified designs. Because SWNA will rely on its survey data to convince the Office of Zoning that there is a majority of people in Southwest who are opposed to the proposed Waterfront proposal, it is important that the Office of Zoning be made aware of the shortcomings of their data.

In the instance of the SWNA survey, SWNA violated survey design principals in 2 major respects.

Zoning Commission
District of Columbia
Case 02-38
Exhibit 27

1. The survey is not representative and did not utilize a representative random sample. Nor were controls put in to place to prevent people from submitting multiple questionnaires or from preventing people who did not live in SW from returning questionnaires.

2. The questionnaire contains a limited set of questions that are intended to skew the results away from the proposed plan; additionally, questions lacked appropriate response categories.

I limit my critique to these 2 areas, but other issues such as confidence levels, margins of error and confidence intervals were also ignored in the SWNA survey.

The following are examples of the 2 design failures I referenced:

Not representative: Only those people who received the questionnaire had an opportunity to complete and return it. Not everyone in Southwest received the survey and many Southwesters did not even know that there was a survey being conducted. In addition, many of the questionnaires were distributed and collected by people located at the Mall who had strong interests in the results

ZONING COMMISSION
District of Columbia
CASE NO.02-38
EXHIBIT NO.27

coming out in a particular way. By its own report, SWNA reported that over half of the surveys were collected by vendors in the Mall.

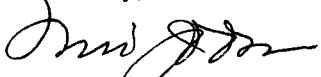
There is no way to assure that survey respondents did not submit multiple questionnaires – Respondent names and addresses were requested, but not required; how was duplication avoided? Indeed, during the DC Department of Transportation's January 29, 2003 public hearing in Southwest, the SWNA representative responsible for the survey told everyone present that one shop owner in the Mall had submitted nearly 200 surveys. Those surveys only contained answers to 2 questions that benefited the shop owner. Again, by its own report, SWNA used only 406 of over 600 responses submitted (although they inexplicably base their resulting calculations on 498 responses) meaning that they determined that nearly one third of the initial responses were inappropriate. This calls into question any results from those questionnaires that they did include.

Questions skew the results away from the proposed plan and questions lacked appropriate response categories: The 10-questions in their survey focused only on parts of issues. For example, the questions concerning the opening of 4th Street, SW to vehicular traffic focused only on pedestrian safety. No question was asked about improving access and mobility. One question concerned the retention of current merchants but no question was asked about the interest by residents seeking new retailers and creating a different retail mix. In addition, respondents could only answer questions by circling "Yes" or "No." Responses should have had at least included one additional response category such as "Don't Know," "Uncertain," "Need more information," or "No opinion."

While I commend organizations for trying to learn how people feel about issues, there are few shortcuts that can be taken when conducting a general survey that is supposed to be representative of an area such as Southwest with a population estimated to be approximately 12,000 people. In recent years, survey results have been criticized in large measure because they often have been manipulated for political and special interest purposes. However, when done correctly, surveys can enlighten. When done incorrectly, they create confusion and distrust. Unfortunately, the SWNA questionnaire results have created the latter—confusion and distrust.

While SWNA may try to convince the Office of Zoning that there is a majority of people who are opposed to the proposed Waterfront project, I trust that the Office will take into consideration the problems and limitations of their data.

Sincerely,



Michael J. O'Dell

Harbour Square
520 N Street, SW S-616
Washington, DC 20024

202-479-0634
MJODellDC@aol.com

cc Councilmember Sharon Ambrose
DC Zoning Commission