

**GENE SOLON TESTIMONY ON CASE 02-38A AT THE D.C. ZONING COMMISSION
HEARING OF JUNE 14, 2007**

I'm Southwest D.C. resident Gene Solon. Last week, a witness was admonished to stay on point. I intend to stay *exactly* on point, the very point contained in the public notice of *this* hearing, which is, *the applicant in Case 02-38A is requesting a change in mid-project zoning to C-3-C status and an increase in building height there.* OK, fine. But not until we get a LEED certified, more esthetically pleasing *quid pro quo* – a world class key structure on a world class boulevard!

Thanks to the requirement for dialogue between persistent, reasoned, courageous, respect-deserving members of the community and government and developers, the applicant's latest overall plan is a big improvement over the plan the Zoning Commission mistakenly approved years ago. But I refuse to succumb to the dangerous temptations that led others to say they "approve" the proposed project when they *still* have objections to major project features. I state straight out, with *no* contortions – that at *this* point, on *this* evening – I strongly *oppose* granting the request for increased project height. Yes, the latest project proposal comes closer to acceptability – closer, but still "no cigar" – and I congratulate ANC 6D chairperson Moffatt for his lone, reasoned, courageous, respect-deserving vote against plans he's still not satisfied with. We want development, but we want developers to "get it right."

For years, our community and its ANC commissioners have expressed deep dissatisfaction with this proposed project's massive bulk. As you well know, our neighborhood is already fated to suffer a dramatic increase in traffic, and, while we welcome development, we don't want it to be too dense, increasing traffic too much. I have created a table (this one) showing that there are over 50 large projects to be built in our ANC area, with an unfavorable residence-to-office ratio that invites exacerbated traffic congestion. We need a humane *mellowing* of real estate development, not a continued unmitigated sunlight-blocking, view-blocking, heavy-handed *crush* of real estate development. I ask you not to allow this massive project to become even more massive. Along with a softening of its imposing blockiness, this project needs an *overall reduction* in bulk! Developers say they want to be good neighbors. The applicant will *indeed* be a good neighbor if it will *reduce* project scale and *raise* project quality. *I ask you not to allow any project height increase unless you get, in return, 1. Lower, greenery-capped, M St. buildings for better views and a better environment for many occupants of the mid-site buildings as well as for the rest of us, and 2. Adequate M St. building set-backs providing a less blocky, more terraced, more interesting overall esthetic; better street-level views; more street-level greenery -- and wider walkways in front of M St. stores, so that, without interfering with near-curb pedestrian streams, locals and visitors will be attracted to check out storefronts and stores until they make their final shopping decisions**. I invite you to look at the next page of this testimony, where there's a depiction of a San Francisco proposed project containing such features.

Further, while the public notice refers to "retail uses, including an option for a grocery store," our community has made it clear that it needs not just "an option," but a *deep commitment* to secure on the site not just "a grocery store," but a full-fledged *supermarket*. If there is still no co-signed new agreement between the developer and Safeway, *I ask you to deny the request for increased height (and to withhold final approval of the overall project) until such an agreement is actually signed, sealed and delivered (good business-school teaching).*

Commissioners, our Southwest shopping center's history has been a sad one. Our community has been treated callously: for example, the original 4th St. cut-through pact was agreed to by the developer and our government without notice to our community and its ANC, and, I'm told, so was DDOT's recent reclassification of 4th St. from a local (neighborhood) street to an arterial** street (see the footnotes on the next page). Please do all *you* can, along with developers, the Fenty administration and the new Council, to promulgate respect for our community. Thanks for your attention. I'll welcome your questions, including those about the footnotes to the text I've just read.

***The argument that storefronts must be close to the curb in order to attract shoppers is, in my opinion, one of the weakest arguments the developer made at the June 7th session. In fact, a combination of comfortable storefront area roominess, good storefront visibility, and easy access would be *enticing* to potential shoppers. Further, were the Tiber Island group representative to be inclined to allow increased M St. building height, that would be counter to his publicly expressed wish to provide better views for Tiber Island residents – after all, greater height farther back can cut off as much sky from view as current height closer up.**



This drawing of a proposed San Francisco project shows two features I strongly favor: look how nicely the applicant-proposed one-plane M St. walls could be indented (and their M St. and I St. corners modified) to the advantage of retailers, shoppers and area residents alike; and look how nicely M St. building roofs could be lowered and “greened” to provide much better views for project occupants, for D.C. residents, and for visitors to our capital city!

All of us should work together to help create a world class Southwest/Southeast D.C. boulevard. We should make sure that the M St. side of this key project is “greened” and reshaped so as to be more like what is shown in the drawing.

****A King County, Washington document states: “Arterials are considered the primary routes between communities, with speeds ranging from 35 mph to 55 mph and traffic volumes over 2,000 vehicles per day.”**

NOTES:

An architecture website states that New York’s “Equitable Building ... was so massive that it provoked the first serious regulation of office buildings in New York, the Zoning Resolution of 1916. The resolution pioneered setback lines for skyscrapers that would permit more light and air to reach the street.”

The following list from Halcyon Ltd Consultants contains widely respected examples of MXD projects with set back retail establishments. Note the references to our metropolitan area’s Clarendon Court and Pentagon Row projects.

National Examples

These projects ... are proving new acceptance by developers and financiers that “living above the store” is now again acceptable –and even preferred—with projects such as :

- Cameron Village Raleigh NC –resurrected Village Center –addition of significant upgrades in Specialty Retail + Anchors + Office + Grocery has yielded a significant increase in visitation, retention of quality orientation, and sales to existing tenants and to Library.
- **Clarendon Court--In Arlington VA** –project features Home Décor Retail Anchors combined with Residential and Office
- Birkdale Village Charlotte NC –a new Neo-traditional Village Center with Retail + Foodservice topped by MF Residential
- **Pentagon Row, Arlington VA** –Specialty Retail + Lifestyle Anchors + Grocery combined with significant upper story Residential
- Old Town Pasadena Ca—mix of new and renovated areas using Specialty Retail + Mini-anchors and imaginative Foodservice to resurrect this neighborhood center—again Home Décor and Lifestyle retailers are critical components
- The Grove Los Angeles—Lifestyle and Mini-Anchors combined with Cafes lining a pedestrian outdoor street—attention to variegated architectural treatments creates ‘Village’ feel
- Santana Row, San Jose CA---development around new Street Retail with additional mixed uses of Residential + office