ANC 6B
Capitol Hill / Southeast
Advisory Neighborhood Commission 6B
921 Pennsylvania Avenue SE
Washington, DC 20003

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Zoning Commission
DC Office of Zoning
441 4th Street, NW
Suite 210 South
Washington, DC 20001

Re: ZC #03-12 & #03-13
Capper Carrollsburg PUD

Dear Commissioners:

After reviewing the post-hearing submission by the applicants, ANC 6B remains concerned over the three items originally outlined in our report to the Zoning Commission:

1. The lack of open space in the heart of the development.
2. The lack of a clear public amenities package, especially the lack of recreation facilities and a clear plan for the construction and operation of the community center.
3. The 110 foot height of the office building at 600 M Street, SE.

[In addition, ANC 6B is concerned over the issue of the taking of private houses within the development area, contrary to earlier representations to the ANC.]

Open Space

The first issue is the lack of open space within the project. During their presentation, the developer made a comparison between the density of the project and the density of the neighborhood around Lincoln Park – presumable as a representative of a typical Capitol Hill neighborhood. However, the developers density comparison specifically exclude any non-residential space from the calculation – thus making the calculations useless for purposes of comparison of the issue of open space and of a mixed use development containing a large amount of commercial space.

A better approach is to look at the overall land use within the comparison areas. The area of the project, including Canal Park, is roughly 60% of the referenced Lincoln Park

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Exhibit 62

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neighborhood.[1] Into this smaller area, the developer proposes to build nearly as many housing units (91% -- 1574 in the proposed development compared to 1723 in the Lincoln Park area) and 753,000 sq. ft of commercial development (Tab 13, p.1). Thus, the amount of open space in the proposed development will be significantly less that a typical Capitol Hill neighborhood.

Also, a typical Capitol Hill neighborhood has extensive front yard setback requirements, which add to the open space. This is particularly true in the Lincoln Park area where East Capitol Street, North Carolina Avenue and Massachusetts Avenue have very large setback requirements. In contrast, the proposed townhouses appear to have little, if any, setback from the sidewalk.

In addition, the largest portion of the open space (Canal Park) will border the medium-rise area between 2 and 3rd Streets, and will not be a integral part of the townhouse development.

Concern over amenities.

The ANC remains concerned about the project's public amenities package. The developer and the Housing Authority continue to claim the value of the land for Canal Park as part of the package, even though this is a Federal Reservation that has been specifically designated for recreation activities. Likewise, the Community and Supportive Services Program (CSSP) is included in the package. IT is the ANC's belief that the CSSP should not be counted as a public benefit – in that it is not something over and above what would occur without the project. The purpose of the CSSP is to help those who currently reside at the site to be eligible to return. In other words, it is to help people stay where they are and avoid displacement. This is not a benefit – but a program to mitigate the potential negative of displacement. It should be treated as a cost of the project – similar to the cost of the land. Removing the value of the land for Canal Park and the CSSP places the true value of the public amenities package at $7,785,000.

$3,000,000 of that package is for the construction 18,000 sq. ft. one story community center. However, there continues to be a lack of specificity. Construction is schedule for early 2005, but "the building and its programs remain in the planning stages." (Tab 7) The applicant outlines a variety of possible activities. But there is no indication that the proposed one-story building (which will occupy roughly the same footprint as the existing one and a half story building) will be adequate for all of the proposed activities. Nor is it clear what happens if the $3 million budgeted for the building is not sufficient. We would suggest that a more appropriate model for the community center is the new Sherwood Recreation Center located at 10th and G Streets, NE.

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[1] According to Tab 13 of the post-hearing submission, the referenced Lincoln Park neighborhood is between 8th and 14th Streets and Independence and Constitution Aves. To equal this area, the proposed development project would have to encompass roughly all of the area between 2nd and 9th Streets and F to M Streets.

Beyond the building itself is the issue of programs. The applicant states that the facility "will likely be leased by the DCHA to the CDC for operation and management of recreation and community programs." (Tab 7) However, there are no specific discussion of the terms of the lease or the funding for the programs. The CDC is currently funding to provide the CSSP. That funding is of limited duration and is specifically to help resident during the transition period. It does not include on-going community and recreational programs. The question of funding the on-going programs is left up in the air.

Finally, Tab 7 states that "there will be no health clinic in the community center." Yet, the applicant has not stated where space will be provided for a health clinic. This is especially critical for a development where a key portion of the project is housing for seniors.

Height of 600 M

As the developer states in their post-hearing submission, "M Street has the potential to become a grand urban boulevard lined by taller buildings containing more intense uses than is currently the case." (Tab 12) Such a statement conjures visions of other commercial strips in the area, such as Crystal City and Rosslyn. While this maybe appropriate for the New Jersey Avenue and the western portion of M Street, it is exactly the opposite of what changes to Zoning Regulations over the past few years have attempted to create. A grand boulevard – yes. But not a canyon of tall buildings. The current Zoning Regulations – especially the 8th Street Overlay Area – implicitly set up a scaling down of buildings along M street. In their community presentations, the developer explicitly referred to the design as one that steps down in height as it move from west to east. Yet, the proposed heights at 600 M stand in contrast to that claim. In fact, rather than having the effect of stepping down as the project moves from west to east, the proposed heights at 600 M will create a high-rise ring around the project. The result will not be a "residential neighborhood in the interior portion of the development, consistent with the blocks of Capitol Hill today" (Tab 12, p.2). Capitol Hill residential block are not surrounded by a ring of high-rises. Instead, the results will be an isolated set of townhouses surrounded by 130 ft buildings to the west at New Jersey Ave, 110 ft buildings to the south along M Street, the new Marine Barracks to the east and the SE Freeway to the north. The only place to break through this ring wall of tall structures is the corner of the development at 500-600 M Street.

The height of the 600 M is especially important in relation to the townhouse to built directly behind the building on the 600 block of L Street. Under the current proposal, these units would be trapped between the new Marine Barracks to the north and a 110 ft office building looming up their backs.[2]

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[2] Note that this block has the lowest concentration of market-rate housing and the highest concentration of public housing and Section 8 housing of any of the townhouse blocks (Tab 9).

The applicant makes numerous reference to the building heights at South Capitol Street and New Jersey Avenues. This comparison is irrelevant. Those areas are at the other side of the project and are explicitly recognized in the Comprehensive Plan as areas where higher buildings are allowed. The Comprehensive Plan does not call for buildings of the same 130/110 foot heights abutting 8th Street. The applicant also claims that their 110 ft buildings would provide a frame for the new buildings to the far end of 11th Street. However, these buildings (Maritime Plaza) are only 90 feet, are set next to both the 11th Street bridge and its access ramps and the high buildings at the 11th Street end of the Navy Yard and are separated from the 600 of M block by a number of blocks of lower buildings in the 8th Street Overlay area. Maritime Plaza also includes a large plaza in the center of the development – unlike anything at Capper/Carrollsburg. In contrast, the proposed building at 600 M is to be 20 feet taller and abut not other tall structures, but the 40 ft high limits of the 8th Street Overlay area and the historic low rise structures (the Latrobe Gate and the Navy Yard townhouses) along M Street from approximately 6th Street to 10th Street.

The developer argues that a height restriction would result in the loss of 50,000 sq. ft of rental office space (Tab 12). That would reduce the amount of commercial development from 753,000 sq. ft to 700,000 sq. ft – or 6.6%. Yet, the developer is giving up space on New Jersey Avenue. The explicit rationale is that rents along M Street will be higher than along New Jersey Avenue. Yet, the developer has shown no evidence that the New Jersey Ave. site – three blocks from the new DOT Headquarters building, closer to the Metro stop and on a direct line with the Capitol (and presumable with Capitol views from the higher floors) – will command significantly less rents. Nor have they demonstrated that even if there is a small incremental difference in rent between the two sites, that small incremental difference on 6.6% of the total commercial space will make any real difference in the overall economics of the project. Assuming a 10% premium for the M Street site over New Jersey Avenue, this would mean a reduction in the commercially rental income of slightly over a half a percent (0.66%).

The core of the developer's argument is that a reduction in the height will mean less value for those buildings and therefore less money available for the public housing units. According to the developer's submission (Tab 11, p. 2), sale of the land for the office buildings constitutes $16.2 million (out of a total of $37.3 million for proceeds of land sales). It is those proceeds from the land sales that will help finance the public housing units. Presumably, a reduction in the value of the land sale would correspond to the same reduction in rental income. A 0.66% reduction in rents would translate into a reduction of $106,000 in proceeds from the land sale, out of a public housing subsidy of $32 million (within the $424 million over project value).

Thus, there does not appear to be any overwhelming economic rationale for why 600 M needs to be so much higher than the surrounding buildings. Given the lack of an overwhelming economic argument, land use and design concerns should prevail. And design consideration should, we would argue, call for office buildings at 600 M that are more in keeping with their surroundings.

Conclusion

ANC 6B repeats its original recommendation to the Zoning Commission that we withhold support of the preliminary PUD until and unless these concerns are alleviated.

We would urge the Zoning Commission to include the following in any Order it may issue:

1. a requirement for more open space in the townhouse portion of the development
2. a requirement for specific details of recreation and community programs, including an means of ensuring that the facility is adequate to the community needs and that there is a reasonable likelihood of on-going funding
3. a height limit for the office building on M Street between 5th and 7th Streets in keeping with the current R-5-B zoning and the 8th Street Overlay.

Very truly yours,

Julie Olson
Chairperson

Cc: Whayne S Quin, Holland & Knight
ANC 6D