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Statement of
Emily Hotaling Eig
On behalf of
WATERGATE WEST
Zoning Case 03-16(62-19)
Before the
Zoning Commission for the District of Columbia
March 1, 2004

Madam Chairman and members of the Commission, I am Emily Hotaling Eig. I am an architectural historian and preservation consultant, and the president of EHT Traceries, Inc.

In January 2004, my firm was asked to evaluate the Watergate's potential for listing as an individual landmark in the District of Columbia Inventory of Historic Sites and individual listing in the National Register of Historic Places. Although my initial empirical response was a strong 'yes', we collected and evaluated an extensive amount of documentation (both primary and secondary), concluding that my initial response did not do justice to the importance of this extraordinary building group. As a result, EHT Traceries prepared and submitted an historic landmark application for the Watergate on behalf of The Committee to Preserve the Watergate Heritage, Inc. I believe that the information that I present tonight will inform you as to the importance of the hotel as a critical aspect of the Watergate and should guide you to a decision to deny this application.

To begin, the Watergate stands as one of America's most recognized properties, a unified and connected grouping of six building elements, symbolizing twentieth century Washington, D.C. through its exceptional and innovative modern design, its significant and influential expression of mixed use made possible through the first private utilization of the Planned Unit Development (PUD) zoning process, and its unusual association with national politics. I am here to explain its significance as an extraordinarily influential example of the use of the PUD zoning tool and explain

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why the specific mix of uses at the Watergate is a character-defining feature that should not be altered at this time for the reasons presented by the applicant.

Conceived by one of Europe's largest international development companies, the *Societa Generale Immobiliare* of Rome, the complex was planned and constructed from 1960 to 1971. The curvilinear Watergate complex was designed by the Italian master designer Luigi Moretti (1907-1973), one of Europe's most significant twentieth-century architects, with local architectural firm Corning, Moore, Elmore and Fischer. The design, a product of the Modern Movement, inspired by the architecture of Bath, England, is exemplary of Moretti's later work. Its distinctive form and detailing have made the Watergate one of the most prominent, recognized, and controversial building complexes in Washington. It is understood to be one of the first computer-designed buildings, a feat that represents a critical event in the history of the practice of architecture. Further, the landscape plan at Watergate was designed by Boris Timchenko, a noted Russian-born landscape architect. Noted Italian sculptor and muralist Pietro Lazarri executed the concrete bas-relief frieze in the lobby of Watergate West.
It is, however, the importance of the Watergate as a pivotal seminal example of the PUD and its specific blend of a variety of uses (one of he most critical being the hotel) that brings me here tonight.

The Watergate was designed to be---not a group of apartment building with amenities, but a "multi-purpose community." From its beginning, the complex included three co-op apartment buildings with commercial areas, an office building, and a residential hotel—all the conveniences of a "city-within-a-city." It was designed to provide a lively, open environment for a new kind of urban living, one that included a hotel and restaurants, residential, retail, and commercial office uses within the elegance of modern European style (and one that offered a mutually beneficial relationship with the nearby Kennedy Center providing accommodations and services for both performers and support staff, as well as theater- and concert-goers.) It was the implementation of an urban ideal, a counter to the death toll that was striking America's cities in mid-twentieth century. It was to be called "Watergate Towne."

This innovative approach to urban life, achieved in an area of Washington that was considered at the time to be little more than blight, was a seminal concept. In 1960, at the time of its purchase, the 10-acre site at the edge of Rock Creek Park overlooking the Potomac River, was zoned SP, which allowed for the construction of apartment buildings covering 75% of the site. But at a series of meetings held in Rome between Moretti and Fischer, this standard approach was replaced with a new idea—that something different, something special should happen at this site. Two main concepts crystallized: 1) leaving the site more open; and 2) creating "multi-purpose" buildings. Fischer reported that the architects "looked on Watergate as an opportunity to create a new style and kind of urban living in Washington. They envisioned, and then planned, a community in which people could work, live, shop and find recreation."

Faced with zoning that prohibited a mix of uses, the implementation of this vision required an equally pioneering zoning tool, the PUD. In fact, the Watergate project is considered one of the most successfully executed early PUDs in the country, and the first known private-initiative project in Washington, DC to take advantage of the PUD system of development incentives in exchange for public benefit and amenities. For the record, for I am sure that the commission is familiar with these facts, the PUD provision was incorporated into the new 1958 DC Zoning Code (amended in 1961) with the intention of attracting suburbanites back into the declining center city. Although PUDs for two DC Housing Authority urban renewal projects predate Watergate by a matter of months, (and I must note that one of the Anacostia examples is no longer standing and the other in Columbia Heights is demonstrably less ambitious being a combination of medium- and low-rise apartments and a school). Watergate was the first project designed with DC's suburbanite target market in mind and represents an extraordinarily significant innovative and creative use of this new type of zoning tool. [1] Unlike the DC Housing Authority projects, the Watergate PUD fully incorporated the elements that today are considered quintessential to the PUD – mixed-uses, mixed-incomes, common amenities,

[1] According to the DC Zoning Commission File 62-19, Final Setdown Report for Zoning Commission Case Number 03-16/62-19, 19 January 2004, "The Watergate Complex was approved as one of the first Planned Unit Developments (PUDs) in the District in 1962 (Case # 62-19)." The 2003 DC Zoning Map lists only two prior PUDs, both dating from

and cooperative occupant ownership. The Watergate PUD envisioned not only a reconfiguration of vestigial city dwellers, but a new lifestyle option that would create an "in-city neighborhood which will provide many of the virtues of small town or village—personal ownership, friends, proximity to work,, and community services—along with the advantages of city life."

While the mixed-use apartment-hotel was a widespread residential typology in European and American cities at the turn of the twentieth century,[2] restrictive zoning practices that gained prevalence during the twentieth-century favored single-use residential neighborhoods.[3] Concurrently, changes in home financing policies and transportation accessibility encouraged suburban growth and urban depopulation. By the 1950s, Washington, D.C., like most American cities, had experienced a precipitous decline in urban real estate values and in the municipal tax base. Rising dialogue within professional organizations of urban planners presented the "planned unit development" of large tracts of urban land as a solution.[4] Although surveys showed that in the 1950s about half of the large cities in the United States had a provision for special zoning rarely review of large projects,[5] most municipalities had no such provision, and those that did employed them.[6] The "single lot zoning envelope" predominated zoning practice, encouraging blandly designed and built-to-bulk architecture. Moreover, single use-type zones discouraged commercial activity and social vitality. To develop lively and marketable communities, cities would have to adopt flexible zoning procedures that facilitated "beyond the box" contemporary architectural design and on-site amenities prohibited by as-of-right use zones.

1961 (Case #s 61-11 and 61-52). However, the 2003 DC Zoning Map includes a disclaimer stating that PUD listings may not be comprehensive.

[2] Vestbro, Dick Urban, "From Collective Housing to Cohousing: A Summary of Research," *Journal of Architectural and Planning Research* v. 17 n. 2 (2000 Summer): 167.

[3] Plunz, Richard, *History of Housing in New York City: Dwelling Type and Social Change in the American Metropolis* New York: Columbia University Press, 1990.

[4] Bangs, Frank S., Jr. "PUD in Practice," in *Frontiers of Planned Unit Development*, ed. Robert W. Burchell (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University, 1973), 24.

[5] Goldston, Eli and James H. Scheuer, "Zoning of Planned Residential Developments," *Harvard Law Review* 73 (1959): 252.

Consequently, when the District of Columbia commissioned Consulting Engineer and City Planner Harold M. Lewis of New York to prepare a rezoning study in 1956, the planned unit development was offered as a means to repopulation and revitalization. The Lewis plan, mitigated with slightly higher densities than recommended, became the DC Zoning Code on May 12, 1958. For the most part, Lewis's plan prescribed that the city become more like the suburbs, with lower densities and more detached single-family houses with garages, as a remedy for depopulation. Large-scale developments, however, were considered an exception. Lewis's report recommended that:

> *"...a broad loophole in the height limits can be achieved through submission of plans for the development of large acreages to the Planning Commission. By the procedure provided in the regulations, it is contemplated that exceptions to permit dramatically tall buildings can be made where review of the whole design assures the controlling body that fundamental purposes of the zoning controls are satisfied. Redevelopment projects form another path through which the strict application of blanket height controls can be set aside in favor of a more refined system of design control.*[7]

Specifically, Lewis recommended the creation of "SP" (Special Purpose) and "R-5-D" zones allowing high-density 8-story apartment buildings. The Watergate site in Foggy Bottom, a site beset by poverty and industrial residue, was initially zoned R-5-D, then rezoned SP in 1962. These zoning groupings were specifically intended to "provide attractive close-in living facilities that might assist in winning back numbers of high-income families who moved to the suburbs years ago."[8] Lewis conceived of these special large-scale developments as a dramatic departure from conventional urban

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[6] Goldston, Eli and James H. Scheuer, "Zoning of Planned Residential Developments," *Harvard Law Review* 73 (1959): 241-42.
[7] Lewis, Harold M., *A New Zoning Plan for the District of Columbia: Final Report of the Rezoning Study* (New York: 1956), 55.
[8] Barthelmes, Wes, "Commission Calls Code 'Acceptable, Workable,'" *The Washington Post*, 10 May 1958, Sec. P, p. C11.

form. They would be self-sufficient, insular towns within the city. Rather than creating vitality within the existing urban fabric, they would create safe new environments insulated from the urban blight that had driven residents to the suburbs in the first place. To ensure that projects conformed to this conception, an intensive review was instituted as part of the PUD approval process. According to the PUD process set forth in Article 75 of Lewis's *Final Report*, the newly-created office of the Zoning Administrator would forward plans for a large-scale development to the National Capital Planning Commission (NCPC), which, in its role as the city's planning board, would evaluate the project in terms of use mix, open space, attractiveness, as well as in typical terms of size and mass.[9] PUD approvals were to run with the land.

In light of the 1958 rezoning, the formerly undesirable industrial land in Foggy Bottom became attractive to developers (see Sanborn maps). Perceiving the value of its proximity to the Capitol, the White House, Downtown, and Georgetown, the prominent Italian development company *Societa Generale Immobiliare* (SGI) purchased a curving ten-acre site that made up the great majority of Square 8 in June 1960. [10] On March 14, 1962, after resolution of legal obstacles to the implementation of PUDs on Federal and/or designated urban renewal land, a Zoning Commission Official Notice for an "Application of Island Vista, Inc., for consideration under provision of Article 75, a large-scale planning development known as 'Water Gate'" appeared in *The Washington Post.*

[9] Lewis, Harold M., *A New Zoning Plan for the District of Columbia: Final Report of the Rezoning Study* (New York: 1956), 175-76.
[10] White, Jean M., "More Woes Plague Watergate Project: New Arts Commission Objects," *The Washington Post*, 18 Oct 1963.

The 1958 DC Zoning Code clearly stated that, to be approved, a PUD must demonstrate that it "enhances the neighborhood" and "provides present or future occupants of planned unit developments with a living or working environment and amenities superior to those that could be achieved by applying the other zoning provisions ~~of this title~~" [11] As summarized by Washington urban planner Julius S. Levine, PUD communities "are directed at the private sector which through incentive programs is designated as the vehicle of implementation for public policy."[12] While public housing projects provided the benefits of affordable housing, they were not in a position to benefit from amenity-incentive bargaining like private sector developers were. From Watergate's inception, developers grasped the value of amenities not only in exchange for zoning incentives, but also for marketing. To qualify for PUD incentives, SGI persuaded regulatory authorities that Watergate's open space, population density, mix of uses, cooperative occupant ownership, and income diversity all would constitute public benefits.[13] Architecture also was considered a public benefit and a matter subject to public review, as emphasized by Goldston and Scheuer in their concluding statement that, "There is increasing recognition that the concept of general welfare is broad enough to include a public interest in community appearance and that planning laws can properly include beauty along with the traditional objectives of safety, health, and morals."[14] On April 13, 1962, the DC Zoning Advisory Council approved the Watergate PUD as in public interest.[15]

Riverview Realty Corp., the sales agency partnered with SGI at Watergate, transferred these benefits directly to their marketing agenda. Harold A. Lewis (not Harold M. Lewis) of Riverview advertised

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[11] DC Law 2400.7 + DC: Zoning Regulations of the District of Columbia; May 12, 1958 §7501.1 Purposes of the PUD P.50

[12] Levine, Julius S., "New Communities American Style," in *Frontiers of Planned Unit Development*, ed. Robert W. Burchell (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University, 1973), 46.

[13] Strayer, Martha "O.K. Assured for Watergate Towne," *The Washington Daily News*, 5 Feb 1964, p. 16. Although the cost of living at Watergate rapidly escalated, the developers' original intention to provide income diversity does seem genuine. In 1963, cooperative units in Watergate East ranged from $17,600 for efficiencies to over $200,000 for large penthouses. By 1969 Watergate West efficiencies started at $28,000, and by 1970 Watergate South efficiencies started at $32,000 [Goode, James M, *Best Addresses* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1988), 436.]

[14] Goldston, Eli and James H. Scheuer, "Zoning of Planned Residential Developments," *Harvard Law Review* 73 (1959): 265.

[15] DC Zoning Advisory Council, File 62-19, Transcript from Public Hearing, 13 April 1962.

that Watergate would catalyze a new urban vitality for Washington. He even espoused the virtues of the "city town" at Watergate.[16] In an article in *National Capital Area Realtor,* Harold A. Lewis described Watergate's pivotal role in Washington's revitalization:

> *I don't wish to over-simplify a complex situation, but to my way of thinking the plight of our cities has been largely due to the desire of the people for things the city should have and could have, but did not provide – a little fresh air, a little space, a little privacy, a little greenery, and a chance for an ordered, human existence.*
>
> *"Whether or not the people actually found these things in suburbia is beside the point. The important thing is that they left the cities to look for them. I think we can put some of the guilt on the cities for failing to provide a real alternative for their disaffected inhabitants.*
>
> *"...We believe that Watergate is the forerunner of the planned urban community. We are creating a town within a city.*[17]

Realizing a viable development with such ample amenities required involved negotiations about zoning incentives with the DC Zoning Commission. Federal review by the Commission of Fine Arts (CFA) and NCPC further influenced the project. The DC Zoning Commission conditionally approved the PUD on July 17th, 1962, stipulating additional review by Federal commissions and agencies.[18] As required at the time, CFA and NCPC subsequently reviewed and refined the site plan, height, and program through to final approvals in 1969.[19]

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[16] "New Urban Housing Pattern," *The Evening Star*, Washington, DC, 11 Sept 1964, sec. B p., 19.
[17] Lewis, Harold A., "Watergate...Town within a City," *National Capital Area Realtor,* 7.
[18] DC Zoning Commission File 62-19, Letter to Mr. Joseph Luria, 17 July 1962.
[19] Kohler, Sue A., *The Commission of Fine Arts: A Brief History, 1910-1976* (Washington, DC: The Commission of Fine Arts, 1985), 77.

The original site plan was composed of five organically curved building footprints around a series of open courtyards featuring fountains, a swimming pool, green space, and nineteen freestanding villas. Only 3 acres of the 10-acre site were to be to be built, with the balance remaining open parkland, but the 3 acres were to be built to a very dense Floor-to-Area ratio of 7.5.[20] This concept remained largely intact through the rounds of CFA and NCPC review. The elimination of the villas was a significant change made by the CFA in November 1963. The location and design of pools and ponds were shifted in response, although the general composition and balance of built to open space closely resembled the original July 1962 drawings.

The original PUD approved by the DC Zoning Commission called for 1,300 dwellings including nineteen "villas"; 300 hotel rooms; 185,000 square feet of office space; 80,000 square feet of retail and service space including a shopping mall; and 1,250 underground parking spaces.[21] The types of uses proposed went uncontested, however, CFA and NCPC required a reduction of the height by one floor and eliminated "villas." By February 1964, immediately before receiving CFA approval, the project was defined as "five apartment buildings, a residential hotel, three restaurants, a shopping center and an underground parking garage for 1300 cars."[22] The shopping mall included a supermarket, drug store, restaurant, dress shop, beauty and barber shops, liquor store, and a bank. The concept of an integral mixed-use program – though the most unconventional element – remained intact throughout the life of the project.

In 1964, Harold A. Lewis, the President of the Riverview Realty Corp, which was the sales and management agent for the $66 million project, described the unique character of the project for the *Washington Evening Star*. "Watergate residents," he stated, "will be able to walk from their homes to their offices. They will be able to shop within the community, as well as lunch and dine there." A 1967 press release heralded the opening of the Watergate Hotel and Office Building, the second phase

[20] Goode, James M, *Best Addresses* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1988), 435.
[21] DC Zoning Commission File 62-19, Final Setdown Report for Zoning Commission Case Number 03-16/62-19, 19 January 2004, Attachment II.
[22] Strayer, Martha "O.K. Assured for Watergate Towne," *The Washington Daily News*, 5 Feb 1964, p. 16.

of construction following the complex's first building, Watergate East. Now, the Watergate was "exhibiting for the first time its entire multi-purpose character." The office building would ensure "daytime vitality," while the hotel would provide "superior accommodations for ... out-of-town visitors and clients. When you require catering and function rooms for meetings, luncheons, dinner parties, the Watergate's expert staff becomes a no-overhead addition to your office manpower." The opening of the hotel and office building "fully realizes the multi-purpose design of the Watergate community."

Upon its completion, Watergate was considered by both developers and the public to fulfill the hopes vested in the 1958 and 1961 zoning changes – to affirm that decades of urban investment could in fact be salvaged through strategic policy change. The legacy of the Watergate PUD influenced private-sector urban redevelopment in Washington, DC and elsewhere. The marketability and reproducibility of the Watergate PUD concept stimulated projects such as Columbia Plaza, Van Ness Centre, Grosvenor Park, the Rotunda, and Sutton Towers, all which attempted to emulate the Watergate's success.

However, I would argue that the beauty of the Watergate is greater than self-contained living. Not only does the hotel *offer numerous services to* the Watergate occupants (both residents and office tenants), but it provides a *distinctly PUBLIC component to this specialized community.* As exclusive as many may view the Watergate, the fact is that the Watergate is not a gated community. It is not just a series of apartment buildings with some random restaurant or retail services vaguely open to the public but really catering only to the residents. It is something better, something greater than that. It is a very special place that does not shut the public out. And how do we know that? Because it has a hotel. The inclusion of an hotel was, and continues to be, a critical use within the mix. The hotel provides a formal and unequivocal welcome to the greater community, the city itself. Although the designers of Watergate clearly expected and encouraged use of the shops and restaurants by the surrounding Foggy Bottom area, the hotel by its very definition <u>required</u> use by the greater public The importance of the hotel can be seen in the relationship between the Watergate and the Kennedy

Center—where performers and audience alike make use of the hotel's public accommodations—rooms, restaurant, bar, and garage while the Watergate's residents enjoy the close proximity to the Kennedy Center. . The hotel brings definition to the "town within a city" concept associated with the development from its original conception.

As stated by Harold A. Lewis in *National Capital Area Realtor*:

> *There is no question in my mind that Watergate has a special character – that it really is unique. But I also am convinced that there is no question but that the principles of urban design and planning embodied in Watergate offer valuable lessons to cities, to developers, and to homeowners, that can be applied generally.*[23]

CONCLUSION

The loss of the hotel would not be a good thing for the Watergate ---or for the city. It would dramatically change the nature of the Watergate, closing it up just when the innovative ideas that created it are being fully recognized for their value in bringing life into the urban experience.

It is not that the proposed use of residential co-ops is inappropriate for this area, it is simply that the Watergate would not have been built in the first place if there had not been a program that balanced the residential apartment components with other significant amenities—amenities which included this hotel. The original architects chose not to design a complex of apartment buildings. They chose instead to do something that would made living in the city attractive and exciting and practical again. The character—the important idea behind the Watergate--- is not just its curvaceous form or ratio of open space to building—it is also its mix of uses—uses that have remained in function since the buildings opened more than 40 years ago. By agreeing to eliminate the hotel, the balance of uses will

[23] Lewis, Harold A., "Watergate...Town within a City," *National Capital Area Realtor,* 7.

be significantly changed and the character of the Watergate, who can experience it, and how it functions will be very different.

It is also counterintuitive. The inclusion of a hotel into a mixed use project has been widely recognized as contributing vitality to a PUD mix. The Urban Land Institute has recognized that, almost 40 years after the completion of the Watergate complex, the presence of a hotel is a critical aspect to the vibrancy of a mixed-use project. Further, the DC Zoning Commission, in a recent zoning case in the West End area of the city, acknowledged the inclusion of a hotel as a significant amenity to mixed-use developments.

The Watergate Hotel has been part and parcel of the Watergate since its conception. It forms a character-defining aspect of the Watergate AND it is the major PUBLIC use of the Watergate. It is this public aspect of the hotel---the continuously changing users, the variety of activities, and the proximity of changing users and activities to the permanent residents of the Watergate—that deserves to be recognized and protected. Why would we choose to eliminate it here where it has been a model of success?

The historic designation of this extraordinary property cannot control its use. The Historic Preservation Review Board can only identify and honor the significance of an idea such as that which created the Watergate. However, the Zoning Commission can protect the unique blend of uses that created and continues to define Watergate and ensure that this specific mix continues.

Thank you.