Testimony of Kenan Jarboe, ANC 6B05
Zoning Commission
ZC #03-21
St. Coletta PUD
November 3, 2003

My name is Kenan Jarboe. I am testifying on behalf of ANC 6B. I am ANC Commissioner for 6B05 and Vice-Chair of ANC 6B's Planning and Zoning Committee. The St. Coletta project is within ANC 6B.

You have a letter from our Chair, Julie Olson, formally stating our position. I would like to elaborate on our concerns. ANC 6B voted unanimously to oppose the application by St. Coletta unless six conditions are met. In brief, they are:

1. to build Burke Street from 19th Street to the end of their leased property as a real street – not simply the proposed driveway for their buses.

2. to help fund the future expansion of Burke Street beyond their leased property.

3. to fund the ground preparation cost for the portion of land south of Burke Street to C Street.

4. gain approval of the design of the facility by the Historic Preservation Review Board

5. tell their bus drivers not to use the 1800 block of Burke Street for bus traffic and put signs on Burke Street to that affect.

6. fund planting of trees on the existing portion of Burke Street

Let me begin with the last two conditions and 9th up the list. The residents of Burke Street are faced with a potential massive increase in traffic. The driveway exit for the bus traffic – some 30 to 40 buses we are told – is directly across from the existing portion of Burke. For any buses seeking to go west or southwest, Burke Street is the natural cut through rather than drive north on 19th to East Capitol and then turn west. The problem is complicated by the fact that St. Coletta does not control the buses. They have told us that these are public school buses. Thus, it is important that some sort of action and signage be placed on Burke to minimize this potentially very disruptive activity on this now quiet residential street.

Even with the best of intentions and signage, we know that some buses will be going down Burke. Traffic, like water, will find the easiest route. Planting of trees is another way of minimizing the noise and compensating the residents for the inevitable increase in traffic.

Condition #4 speaks to the issue of design. We realize that it may be institutionally difficult for HPRB to officially review the design of this project. However, we feel it is extremely important that some sort of design criteria be placed on this site – especially of the promise of the site is an extension of the neighborhood to the river. To us, the best design criteria for this site is that of the Capitol Hill historic district. If you would not

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build it like this on 9th Street, you should not be able to build it like this on 19th Street. And this design would not be built on 9th Street.

To some in the neighborhood, the design is insulting. Personally, I just think it is ugly. I realized the reputation of the designer – but even world famous architects miss occasionally. It is not as if he could create a more appropriate design. St. Coletta originally thought of building on the 1200 block of Pennsylvania Ave and came up with a very appropriate design – which was blocked for reasons other than the main building design. The new DOT headquarters, designed by the same firm, is very appropriate for the site. Now we hear that rather than moving toward something more appropriate, the design is moving is just the opposite direction.

If the Zoning Commission feels that it can not involve the Historic Preservation Review Commission in the design of the building, I would hope at least they would tell the architect to go back and try it again.

The building design is related to the other major concern of the ANC. This site is one of, if not the most, prominent locations on the Reservation 13. The importance of the site is a major reason for neighborhood opposition to this project. What happens at this site will do much to set the tone for future development – in the direction of either an institutional or a neighborhood character. This building – in both its design and its use – sets the tone for creation of institutional enclave.

I will not get into the history of the selection of this project for this site. ANC 6B and the neighbors have made their displeasure with the process well known. Suffice to say that this is not the project we would have wish for on this site.

As part of that process, the final lease for the project was scaled back so that it does not extend south beyond Burke Street. St. Coletta originally want to include some portions of the land between Burke and C Streets. At one point, they were also willing to do the ground preparation of this area to the south of their building and even develop the area as a park.

This history speaks directly to our condition #3. As I will discuss further in a minute, we believe that it is important that St. Coletta contribute to the future development of Reservation 13. They were originally willing to spend money to prepare the area south of Burke when they thought it would be part of their lease. We believe that they should do so regardless as a contribution to future development.

Finally, conditions #1 and #2 speak directly to the value of this project to the neighborhood and the community.

Public benefit is a central concept to the PUD process. St Coletta has outline a public benefit and amenities package that includes services to and a preference for DC students, and the use of the facility, for a fee to cover costs, by local groups.

ANC 6B believes that this package is not adequate in this situation. The public benefits of this project must be measured in the context of the overall development of Reservation 13. The community and the ANC demand that the overall site of Reservation 13 should be integrated into the adjacent neighborhood and provide an extension of the neighborhood to the Anacostia River. This is what the Master Plan Reservation 13 envisions.

If this proposed St. Coletta development is the leading edge of the creation of an institutional enclave on Reservation 13, then the project will not create a public benefit for the neighborhood. Rather, it will have created a public dis-benefit.

To qualify as providing a public benefit, the project should help facilitate the creation of a mixed retail and residential area that extends the neighborhood across 19th Street to the river. It is important to note that the proposed development, in and of itself, can not contribute to the creation of a mixed retail and residential neighborhood in that it is an institutional use.

Given this, it is important that the project contributes to and facilitates the desired development in the adjacent areas in some other way. One of the keys to the development of the site is the creation of the infrastructure. Any future development on the site of Reservation 13 will require the significant building of the local infrastructure, especially the streets.

Therefore, the ANC strongly believes that the application should contribute to the building of the necessary infrastructure both on site and in the adjacent areas. As outlining in conditions #1 and #2, they should contribute to the construction of both the portion of Burke Street that they will be using immediately and the future extension of Burke Street. This is in addition to the ground preparation work (condition #3) which that had at one time already committed to when they thought it would be part of their lease.

Such a contribution is especially important in light of St. Coletta's low land rental fee of $1 a year.

As I understand it, St. Coletta's position is that they are not financially able to contribute to the cost of the infrastructure. I do not believe that this is the case For example, they had originally planned to build this facility at a site on Pennsylvania Avenue that is currently still on the market for over $2 million. Surely the saving in the land cost -- $2 million versus $1 a year – could go toward a road at the site?

St. Coletta is receiving a prime parcel of land that is key to determining the future development of Reservation 13. It is crucial that this project does everything it can to push that development in the direction we all want it to go. This is the real public benefit of the project. Therefore, ANC 6B opposes this PUD unless St. Coletta makes the necessary contributions to the public benefit as described in our six conditions.

Thank you and I would be happy to answer any questions at this time.