Z.C. 04-04

Good evening Chair Mitten, Commissioners. Thank you for your service to our fine city. My name is Ronnie Streff. I am the owner/occupant of my home at 4915 Central Avenue NE. While not relevant to this evening's proceedings, I do want to disclose that I am a volunteer Reserve Police Officer in the District.

I am here in opposition to the zoning change requested by the Carver 2000 Tenants Association. I am a neighbor, sharing a property line with the Association (Square 5190, lots 807 and 808). The property which is the subject of the zoning change request is in the block adjacent to mine. The proposed development would be of a density, size and appearance incongruous with the existing neighborhood.

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The proposed development is much too high. Four stories does not fit into a neighborhood where everything else is two stories. *As reinforced by a presentation for the zoning change, all of the 4-story buildings in the immediate area are in Southeast, not Northeast.* The residents across the street will have their view blocked. They will have sunlight blocked. Any southern breeze will have to go up four stories and come back down to get to the houses on Central Avenue because the proposed building is two blocks long!

I obtained a copy of the document filed with the zoning commission in February from Mr. Gross, the developer Mr. Crawford's lawyer, after receiving a letter of intent to file [dated January 9, 2004]. While trying to obtain further information fom Mr. Gross, I indicated that I would be opposing the zoning change. His response was that I couldn't – I found this highly disturbing and it motivated me to investigate further. I immediately called my ANC Commissioner, Ms. Woods, to ask why she was supporting this development, as indicated in the document [file

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February 6, 2004, page 16, III. Community Comment]. She indicated that she had given her approval to no one and had not seen the document.

Attending various neighborhood meetings, I found that no one seemed to know about the proposal. My neighbors and others at these meetings told me there were going to be 2-story town-homes on the property; that is what they had been told. Never had they dreamed that a 4-story structure could be built across the street from them. I showed them the materials that had been filed. They were almost universally shocked. Especially shocking: the shear size of the development, 2 blocks long and 4 stories high; the minute number of parking spaces – 20 spaces for 104 units, staff and visitors; the placement of the loading docks on Central Avenue, the residential side of the property; and that the trash dumpsters would be positioned as close as possible to the only remaining private homes within the block [4817 and 4819 Central Avenue NE]. At the meeting where I first met officers of the Carver 2000 Tenants Association, they seemed not to know details of what had been planned for the property. Discussions provided no answers but more questions. Would children be allowed to visit? How long would children be allowed to visit? Could, for example, a 14-year old relative move in to assist an elderly relative? If a tenant suddenly obtained custody of grandchildren or great-grandchildren, would they be allowed to stay (if so for how long)? Or would they forced to move out (if so how soon)? Sneaking children in is a problem in senior buildings-and in many situations, seniors have unwanted relatives that move in and do not report this for fear of being evicted. Would there be onsite security to deal with unwanted visitors and other security problems? What were to be the rules? Who would enforce the rules? Who could change the rules? What guarantees do we have that this will stay a senior complex? Some of these questions were answered last night by

DHCD – the answer: that we have to trust the tenants association and the management they chose to do these things. So far, their record with us has not been good.

Mary Jackson, *who testified in support of the zoning change,* was quoted in an October 4, 2004 article "Raising Grandchildren" in *The Common Denominator* regarding issues surrounding grandchildren. "Grandchildren can end up in the care of their grandparents for several reasons, the most common of which are the parents' death or drug abuse, Jackson said....she said she didn't hesitate taking custody of her five grandchildren." The article went on to state that "[t]he District records 14.5 percent of children 18-and-under living in [grandparent-headed] households, more than twice the national rate of 6.3 percent....Jackson said these figures are even higher, because many grandparents don't report their situations for fear the government will take the children away....People as old as 80 ears old are trying to take care of adolescents or teenagers who are dealing with their own life changes and **tend to misbehave**, she said." [emphasis added].

It has been made very clear to us that this is pretty much a done deal. The attorneys have made sure that all the all the i's have been dotted and the t's have been crossed in the application process. The parking requirement has been met for the PUD, but barely exceeding the minimum requirements does not meet the minimum <u>needs</u> of the community. As I'm sure you are keenly aware, parking is a major concern for this community, for this entire city. There is parking only on one side of Central Avenue. Many of these parking spots are taken up by the firefighters working out of the firehouse at 49th and Central. Many more are taken up by commuters parking and walking to the Benning Road Metro Station. The reality is that this is not planned as a

nursing home, there are going to be numerous residents with cars, many employees with cars. And these cars are going to be parking on the street.

Crime is a problem in this city. Crime is a problem in Ward 7. When Councilman Chavous, in a community meeting with Chief Ramsey, was asked if Section 8 residents caused more criminal activity than other residents, his response was no, they don't. And this is true. However he followed this up by pointing out that Section 8 residents were more often preyed upon by criminal elements. And this is true. It is also true of elderly residents. Just this morning there was news coverage of an elderly couple being bilked out of their life savings by criminals posing as police officers. I am concerned for the low-income elderly residents of the proposed project.

DHCD has done a commendable job and has leaped many high hurdles to nurse this development along. Their downfall: trusting those whom the tenants association entrusted with this development. I am especially worried about the relationship with H.R. Crawford. Recent articles regarding his alleged activities at other Section 8 properties he manages is disturbing. Another DHCD downfall was a failure to recognize the unnatural neighborhood division that East Capital Street creates. We all know the lesson of neighborhood dividing lines created by highways, railways, rivers and the like. East Capital Street is one of these dividers and will only become more of a divider as traffic naturally increases. ANC boundaries and PSA boundaries (which are based on pre-existing neighborhood boundaries) recognize this. The neighborhood described in the application as having a somewhat suburban feel is primarily north of East Capital Street, the neighborhood where this colossal structure is being proposed. With the exception of the apartments on the property in question, the apartment buildings described are almost exclusively to the south of East Capital Street. And there are very few abandoned

properties in my immediate neighborhood. The "blighted and distressed" feel described in the application is not a perspective my neighbors and I share.

East Washington, Wards 7 and 8 lead this city in recognizing the need for and in asking for affordable housing. I wholeheartedly support low-income housing in Ward 7, especially for senior citizens, as there are many. I also support Section 8 vouchers when properly placed throughout the city, and throughout every neighborhood – not segregated from the rest of the citizens in a high density project.

In closing, the proposed development would be of a density, size and appearance incongruous with the existing neighborhood. The ANC, which is supposed to carry great weight in these matters, while expressing support of affordable senior housing has voted against the zoning change request. I implore you to vote no on this request so that planning for a more fitting development within the confines and constrictions required can start.

As a postscript to the meeting, I am disturbed by the Zoning Commission's implication that ALL low-income senior housing for the District rests on our shoulders; "this is the last chance for this to happen" to roughly quote one of the commissioners. Ward 7 in general my neighbors and I specifically should not bear the responsibility for picking up where the city has dropped the ball. I don't believe you should pass this buck to us with a guilt trip.

I am sure you have been made aware that the compromise you requested was offered at a meeting (October 13, 2004, SMD 7C03, Kelley Miller Middle School). Ms. Erin Carter, the president of the tenants association told us that she was told she could say that they would "lower the building by a couple inches" and that they would move the dumpsters as requested.

*"**A couple inches,**" that is quite a compromise! Obviously not a compromise made in good faith. Following this outreach by the residents on the Northeast side, **no further outreach has been made regarding this matter by the tenant's association to the residents of the Northeast side.***

As I stated in the meeting, I believe a very good solution to this would be to move the proposed building to the Southeast side. The building could be surrounded by townhouses being planned by the tenant's association, providing an atmosphere of support and community for the seniors. The property on the Northeast side could then be developed as townhouses as originally promised. DCHD's past failures on this project could be reconciled by working to see that funding deadlines would be extended to make this reconfiguring of the project happen (all things are possible). Simply moving the building would keep the project alive, create the low-income senior housing desired. Everyone should be happy with this compromise, the Southeast side as proponents of the senior building, and the Northeast side as proponents of consistency in density, size and appearance in their neighborhood.

I again thank you for your time and hope that you will "do right" by the residents, voting against the zoning change.

Thank you,

Ronnie Streff