



Testimony of
Spenser Balog, Sustainable Development Associate, Casey Trees
April 4, 2019

Before the Zoning Commission
on
Redevelopment of 5253-5343 South Dakota Ave NE
DCOZ Case No. 06-10D: The Morris and Gwendolyn Cafritz Foundation

Good evening board members,

My name is Spenser Balog and I am the Sustainable Development Associate with Casey Trees. Casey Trees is a Washington, D.C.-based nonprofit with a mission “to restore, enhance, and protect the tree canopy of the nation’s capital.” To fulfill this mission, we plant trees; monitor the city’s tree canopy; and work with decision makers, developers, and residents to encourage tree planting and protection. We are dedicated to helping the District reach its 40 percent tree canopy goal by 2032. As a city, we can achieve this goal with sustainable development projects that protect existing trees and achieve a net gain in tree canopy.

We are very happy to see new amenities coming to Ward 5 for the community to enjoy, especially ones that encourage creativity and artistic expression. It is encouraging to know that the development team is committed to community outreach and giving current residents adequate opportunity to provide input regarding the future use of the site.

We were very pleased to see green roofs and bioretention used to mitigate stormwater on-site, however, we ask that you also consider the value of protected, accessible, street level green spaces. Ground-level green areas are the only spaces capable of growing the mature trees that are essential for effectively managing intense storms and flooding. The current development plan is slated to remove over 100 trees (Fig. 1) to accommodate the Art Place. We believe it is possible to protect several of these trees and ensure that this site will be environmentally resilient (Fig.2).

We conducted a preliminary site inventory to determine which trees, if any, are protected under the Tree Canopy Protection Amendment Act of 2016. Under this Act, trees 44” to 99.9” in circumference are classified as ‘Special Trees’ and any tree over 100” in circumference is classified as a ‘Heritage Tree’. Our goal in conducting this site inventory was to ensure that mature, healthy trees were preserved where possible and that the level of tree canopy after development would meet or exceed the tree canopy that currently exists.

We have been in touch with the developers and they have been very receptive towards re-evaluating their approach to this development to accommodate several of the Special Trees on-site. We have a few recommendations that we would like to present to the Zoning Commission today. It is not our intention to delay this project or inhibit the development of the Art Place, however, we recommend that, before the Zoning Commission approves the second-stage PUD for Block B of the development site, the developers consider the following:

1. We believe it is possible to protect several street trees along 4th Street, NE (Fig.2). In the development plan, 4th Street NE will be converted to a private pedestrian street and the development plan intends to re-plant street trees in the same location. We request that the development team commits to protecting 7 of the existing street trees.
2. There are several locations on site where trees are planned to be removed that do not directly interfere with the development plans. We request that 3 trees are protected on the perimeter of the future Art Place building – 1 large mature tree on the southeast side of the building and 2 mature pine trees on the North side – as well 1 mature tree beside the residential buildings on the West side (Fig.2).
3. We recommend the development team adopt a 3-to-1 planting ratio on the future site. Over 100 trees are currently projected to be removed and only 110 trees to be planted. It takes many years for mature trees to reach their full potential in providing shade and stormwater retention. Planting 3 trees for every 1 tree removed is compliant with the *American National Standard for Tree Care Operations (ANSI)*.

Taking these actions would add significant shade for visitors attending the Art Place at Fort Totten and greatly assist with stormwater mitigation measures on-site. Although we are only requesting that 10 trees out of over 100 trees on this property are retained, we believe that doing so will provide an immense benefit to the community. The District is projected to see hotter temperatures in the future and dark, impervious surfaces like streets, roofs, and sidewalks soak up this heat and radiate it to the surrounding area. Protecting the existing large canopy trees will ensure cooler temperatures throughout the site and effectively meet the goals of the Climate Ready DC plan, while beautifying the site and providing mental and physical health benefits to residents.

We look forward to working with the development team and to continue the dialogue we started on incorporating more trees into the development plan. We are appreciative of the developer's receptiveness to comments and suggestions, and we look forward to the Zoning Commission's review on the three requests that we have outlined above. We believe that adopting these commitments will help to make this Fort Totten gathering place more resilient in the face of worsening climate effects and make Art Place an example of innovative green design.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Art Place at Fort Totten

Existing Site Condition and Proposed Threat to Tree Canopy



Figure 1: There are currently over 100 trees on the development site- all of them are slated to be removed. Of these trees, approximately 23 are 'special trees' as indicated by the Tree Canopy Protection Amendment Act of 2016

Art Space at Fort Totten

Future Site Condition and Proposed Retention of Existing Trees

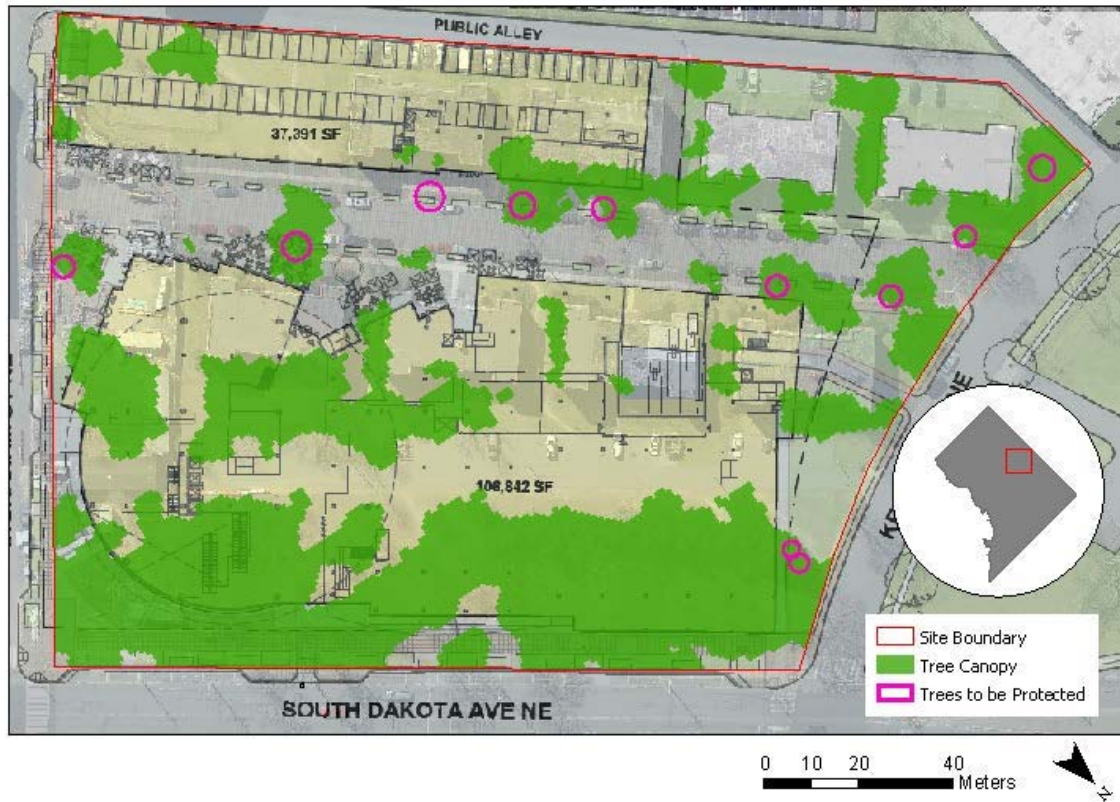


Figure 2: There are several instances where the development plans intend to remove trees that do not feasibly need to be removed. We recommend the outlined trees be protected as a few of these trees are special trees and their wide, mature canopy provides numerous environmental and community benefits.