

Testimony before the DC Zoning Commission

Case No. 08-06A, Subtitle K

By Jim Schulman, AIA

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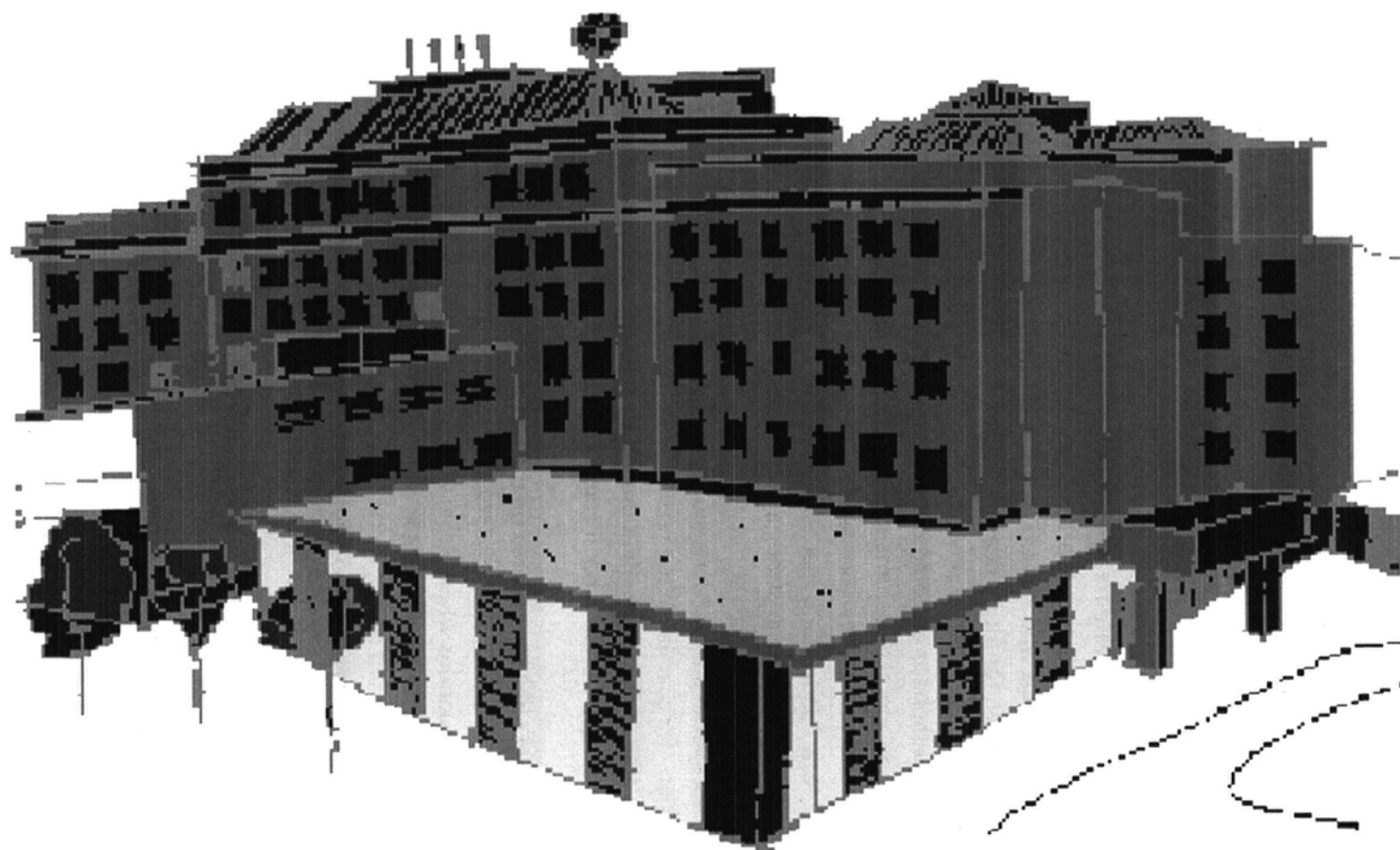
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Good Evening, Chairman Hood, other Zoning Commissioners and Staff! My name is Jim Schulman. I am a registered architect and a sustainability advocate, and I live and work in Ward 6. I am pleased to be able to comment upon one particular facet of the proposed code in the Zoning Regulations Review regarding the Hill East special purpose zone. When the Federal land that comprises Hill East was proposed to be transferred to the District Government for redevelopment back in 2002 and 2003 I attended multiple community meetings on this topic. As you may recall, DC General Hospital's operations were being wound down because its facilities were obsolete and it was operating with a deficit during a time of general financial distress for the District of Columbia. I attended the meetings, in part, because I had learned from many of my low-income neighbors and friends that DC General Hospital was the only location in the city (other than Providence Hospital) where they were treated with dignity as human beings when they had serious health issues. At multiple of these public occasions, then Ward 6 Councilmember, Sharon Ambrose, reassured the hundreds of vocal participants at these meetings who wanted to see public health needs addressed, that greater than 50% of the land in question would be reserved for future health and public health uses. She maintained that the redevelopment process did not constitute a land grab or privatization of public assets, but an attempt to create a mixed-use zone that would maintain its historic emphasis on community health. If my memory serves me, I believe that the terms of the transfer agreement with the Federal Government even included an obligation to use these parcels of land to help meet the health needs of DC Residents. On the reverse of this page you can see a graphic from a flyer that was distributed at one of these meetings. Now I understand that things can and do change, and that preserving health-related uses on these parcels does not appear to be as strong a priority for current civic leaders. I do, however, object strongly to the fact that hospitals, clinics, and other health-related businesses, as health care uses are not permissible uses as a matter of right in the Hill East special purpose zone, but only by special exception. I would like to see the Zoning Commission preserve the option - for that day in the future, when D.C. recognizes that it might want to build a state of the art public hospital - to be able to do so by right in the Hill East district. Chicago in the last decade built a new public hospital and so I maintain that having DC do so is not inconceivable.

In my previous testimony on Tuesday night I had commented on the fact that government land is exempted entirely from zoning. Commissioner May explained that there are issues of sovereignty, among others, involved in such exemption, but he asked for examples of situations where Federal property impacts the city as a function of it being unzoned. The former Federal land that now constitutes Hill East is one example where the separation of Federal and District land use regulation contributes to a lack of clarity, friction, and lost opportunity in our National Capital. I argue for this even recognizing, as I testified on Tuesday, that most zoning codes indirectly serve to preserve historic inequities in land value over generations.

I again thank you for this opportunity to share my views, and I would be happy to attempt to answer any questions.



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