

TESTIMONY ON CASE 11-30 (SOUTHWEST D.C. WATERFRONT REDEVELOPMENT)  
BY GENE SOLON, JULY 18, 2011

I, Southwest D.C. waterfront homeowner Gene Solon, enthusiastically welcome redevelopment of our waterfront -- but in good conscience, I must straightforwardly, without convolution, *oppose* what Hoffman-Madison has submitted as Stage 1 of its *interconnected-stage* redevelopment plan, because that plan, *admitted* to be in flux, is much too fluid for me to consider it adequately defined; because the submittal contains way too many serious flaws; and because our community has never been given a real chance to analyze any *comprehensive* traffic impact study (the Gorove/Slade study contains no safety analysis, and DDOT still “expects to initiate its own study”).

Commissioners, I took this same straightforward approach a few years ago at a hearing on the 4<sup>th</sup> Street development project, and Southwest residents are now gratified that your Commission decided to instruct the developers to improve the design of their buildings. My hope is that you will *likewise* see fit to withhold your acceptance of the Hoffman-Madison submittal until you obtain the resolution of what is widely seen as way too many unresolved issues -- *among* them, lack of Corps of Engineers approval; threatened *waterway* traffic safety and tacking space for sailboats; inadequate detail on waterside promenade *elevation's* effect on ease of access and egress for “live-aboards”; inadequate detail on Pier 4 townhouses and on underwater garage space for townhouse owners; a sudden, ANC-jolting, entertainment center size increase; and *admittedly* less than optimal tourist bus drop-off points. I hope you'll *withhold* acceptance of the submittal until you are able to obtain cancellation of water's edge unsafe admixture of cars, trolleys and pedestrians; the trimming back of over-extended piers; lowering of 130-foot building heights; and *reduced blockage of views of water and sky* (including views *advertised* by the very Mandarin Oriental Hotel at which a recent so-called project “workshop” was held).

I'm deeply saddened that our ANC is listed as an endorser of the inadequately detailed submittal you received, and I just cannot understand how *anybody* -- without having the chance to thoroughly assess traffic impact -- would “approve” a submittal from developers who've been so vague about so many things but who have *refused* to trim project mass and density! I hope you'll *withhold* acceptance of the submittal until you act to allow yourselves and our community enough time to analyze *truly informative* traffic impact studies showing that this project's addition to an *already growing* volume of traffic will be a *livable-with* addition!

I stress the *interconnectivity* of project stages, and the danger of initiating momentum that would prevent needed plan improvement.

Commissioners, projects are *not* balloons, and retailers can thrive in *nine* story buildings! I hope you'll accept *only* that set of submittals that describe a project of *humane scale* that *truly respects* the existing community and will *protect and enhance* rather than destroy what's good in current Southwest D.C. life.

## **COMPARISON OF FLOOR AREA RATIOS (FARs)**

**SOUTHWEST WATERFRONT PROPOSED PROJECT (Case 11-03), 3.87:**  
(“... aggregate floor area ratio of 3.87, which excludes the private roadways and sidewalks.”)

### **ARLINGTON, VA**

**Clarendon, 3.5:** (‘Density is controlled by limiting the Floor Area Ratio (FAR) allowed in station area (Figure 2). The highest FAR (3.5) is restricted to the immediate station area, where the building floor area may be 3. times the parcel size.’)

**Roslyn, (from a chart) Office, 4.8. Residential: 4.7**

### **MONTGOMERY COUNTY, MD**

**Kensington, 2.5:** (*“The highest floor area ratios (FAR) recommended in the core are 2.5 FAR. To staff’s knowledge, there are no areas in the County recommended for a density this high that are not near Metro...”* County Council staff memo , April 2010)

**For Montgomery County Transit Station MXD: “maximum floor area ratio:3.0”**

**GENE SOLON'S REMARKS AT, AND COMMENTS ABOUT, THE ANC 6D MEETING  
OF JULY 11, 2011**

(Initial paragraph deleted) ... I've reviewed the videos of the developer-paid-for "workshop" at the Mandarin Oriental Hotel, and, for one example, *could not find* the segment in which a large "breakout session" audience broke out into *laughter* when, in response to a question about D.C. government monetary largesse to the developers, the session spokesman said that there wasn't any. What videos *did* reveal is that project components are still (quote) "in flux," and that live-aboard community residents and others asked for more meetings. Monty Hoffman's July 11<sup>th</sup> presentation verified -- in spades -- that the project design is, indeed, in flux, so much so, that ANC 6D commissioners had very little to vote for! *Further, Hoffman offered absolutely no concessions on either the height of planned 130+ foot buildings or the number or location of such buildings!* Yet the ANC commissioners did vote to approve the proposed project without any guarantees for improvement -- even though (a) in the past they've required written, signed agreements from businesses, and (b) they had a *long* list of disappointments and desired changes! What a sad spectacle!

*Let's make no mistake: All of us welcome waterfront redevelopment -- but no ANC commissioner should have, so soon, so prematurely, approved any of the interwoven phases of the Hoffman-Madison proposal for massive waterfront development, a proposal that had been presented unrealistically (example: a slide of the proposed waterside "shared zone" showed few people other than a sylphlike young woman walking safe and sound along a roadway devoid of the cars and trolleys traffic volume the developers themselves say is needed for waterside business success); a proposal that would erect 130+ foot high buildings blocking Mandarin Oriental Hotel-advertised lovely water views; a proposal that would replace the concept of a pleasant waterside pedestrian-only promenade with a concept wherein cars, trolleys and people would be unsafely mixed together; a proposal that would build Pier 4 townhouses planned for without adequate notice to community and Council members; a proposal that contains components that are still "in flux" -- such as tourist bus drop-off points and parking for current and new residents; a proposal that has not yet been approved by the Army Corps of Engineers; a proposal that extends piers so far into the channel that they not only block treasured water views, but may jeopardize waterway traffic safety; a proposal that still has not generated a roadway traffic study our community can examine -- something we all have long been requesting! ANC commissioner Litsky made a show of blaming the D.C. Department of Transportation for the lack of a traffic impact study -- but he was dead quiet about the lack of a traffic impact study already required from the developers' own traffic consultant!*

It is *unconscionable* to approve a D.C. development project without knowing what its impact on neighborhood traffic would be!

ANC chairperson McBee had publicly stated (here at Harbour Square!) that if no concessions are made early on, none are likely ever to be made -- so *no* ANC commissioner, or anyone else, should have approved or endorsed *any part* of the Hoffman-Madison proposal, not even conditionally! As years of experience show, conditional approval does not work -- the desired improvements just don't materialize, causing commissioners to wail, "They never listen to us."

Commissioner Moffatt is one of those who had complained that way -- but, oblivious to McBee's warning, all he did this time was to *threaten* to vote "No" on the *second* phase of the project if not enough concessions were offered. How sad -- the second phase has nowhere near the significance of the first phase (the crucial massing and density phase), and Moffatt and his ANC 6D colleagues should *not* have voted to approve the first phase until the developers came back to the ANC with *definite, settled* plans containing first phase improvements our community deserves!

Instead, Mr. Litsky read out, yes, a *long* list of project flaws ("caveats" in Harbour Square board language): absence of traffic impact study, presence of overhead trolley wires, and much more. But get this: (a) Litsky's list *included* criticism of building heights, but (b) Litsky then contradicted himself: Claiming that Councilmember Wells' statement to him that lower building heights would *necessarily* prevent the existence of an adequate number of retail establishments, Litsky actually chastised "people who want to cut buildings to half" their planned heights (nobody at the meeting had even come close to advocating such a thing)! NOTE: If Mr. Wells did make the statement Mr. Litsky said he made, it's a statement as erroneous as his (probably regretted) earlier statement that a development project "is like a balloon," and thus unable to be trimmed back at any point without expansion elsewhere. Such statements are absolute nonsense -- my goodness, America's cities grew up with *stretches* of retail stores at the sidewalk level of *low-rise buildings in which store proprietors and their families lived!* A developer should be made to prove, with budget documents, that *scaling back proposed overly-massive projects to humane proportions is impossible to achieve.*

Mr. Litsky even stooped to accuse people who, with dignity and straightforwardness, advocated voting "No" *on a proposal universally agreed to be flawed and in flux*, as people who were "playing games." No, it was Litsky and others who -- endorsing a flawed proposal while their pockets and purses bulged with long lists of "caveats" -- were the ones playing silly, self-defeating games. They didn't respect the reality that (a) Southwest D.C. waterfront redevelopment is too far advanced to be in any danger of being cancelled, and (b) their endorsement may be cynically exploited in efforts to prevent community-desired improvements.

I remind *everyone* that it's naïve to register at the forthcoming Zoning Commission hearings as a project approver -- and then recite a long list of desired improvements. It should be crystal clear by now that the list of "approvers" is simply flaunted, waved in our faces, as false basis for rushing the project through *without* needed improvements. The safe and straightforward thing to do is to list yourself as someone who is *against* the project as now planned -- and clarify that you *would* testify for a more *humane* project design! ... (final paragraph deleted).