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John D. Hayes  
220 M Street, SW  
Washington, DC 20024

To the members of the District of Columbia Zoning Commission.

I attended the last South West Neighborhood Assembly to review and make comments on the preliminary site design of the South West Waterfront redevelopment project. This project is the single most important issue in the city government affecting our neighborhood and quality of life. As an experienced civil engineer, a master planner, and currently employed by DoD as a program manager in design and construction management, I was very interested in seeing the plan.

I was terribly mistaken. The plan in its entirety was never shown to the community. Worse, the property developer, an experienced and large firm, conveyed inaccurate information about the project to the approximately 150 southwest community members who attended the meeting. I believe the developer intentionally misled the community. I hope my impression is wrong and that the developer will now be fully transparent about the proposal and its impact.

Rather than provide a professional and detailed report, the developer showed a few pictures and when some residents asked to see some of them again – their requests were refused.

It became clear to myself and other community members that the developer believes they have the zoning waivers in the bag. For the developer and the SWNA the meeting was nothing more than “going through the motions.”

By example, any time a member of the community who lives here and knows the local situation and facts asked a hard question, the chair over ruled them and tried to move on without answering the question. On more than one occasion the chair publicly belittled respected members of our community. This is not acceptable.

By granting the developer's requests, without a full and fair review by the community, the DC zoning commission will be complicit in a plan that has been rammed down the throats of the taxpayers.

I would now like to review the proposal, based on my professional experience as a civil engineer for the military. As background, I was most recently deployed to Afghanistan where I was in charge of design and construction management for Kandahar.

Based on my professional experience, I believe there are serious flaws in this plan stemming from the developer's publicly stated “take or leave it position.” I believe, on the facts set out below, the city should urge the developer to amend its plan or

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tell the developer the DC government will seek another offer from one of their competitors. The project is a once in a lifetime opportunity to develop some of the most valuable waterfront real estate in the nation. I am confident that other competing plans, and most definitely more suitable plans, can be found. .

The developer is asking the District to waive existing zoning rules that were established for the good of the city. The current zoning is a balance of open spaces, transportation needs, building height, and occupant density that not only satisfy the community and allow commuters, public services, and tourists to use the area with little to no affect on the inhabitants. To waive these well established zoning rules will most certainly adversely impact the southwest community and jeopardize the overall rebuilding of DC. There is already significant investment in the stadium and the M Street Corridor that will now be at risk if the waterfront development fails. I believe it is a high-risk project that will fail under the current proposal.

First: the waterfront becomes a very high-density area. The open spaces are removed under this plan. The property developer is turning the waterfront area into a street with both vehicular traffic and if their plan is true, a trolley car. However, the picture they presented many times to support their bid shows the waterfront as a 75-foot wide pedestrian area in the architectural 3 dimensional rendering. The result would be the permanent loss of parkland and the community's only open space for families, children and community gatherings.

Second: the plan removes Water Street SW in its entirety and replaces it with 130-foot tall buildings that would become zoned both residential and commercial. There is no discussion in the plan to alleviate traffic congestion or protect pedestrian traffic which -- with two schools in the local area -- would include children. This plan leaves Maine Avenue as the only street connecting the South West plus any traffic coming from M Street and Anacostia with Northern Virginia or NorthWest DC.

With the Stadium and M Street development, on game days, traffic is at a stop. What the developer is proposing is simply even more people, even more cars and less road and less sidewalk space to handle them.

At the community meeting, the developer seemed to wish away the problem and our stated concerns by claiming that taxis, the metro and buses would take care of it. But it is clear, once Water Street is gone, M Street will have to accommodate a drop-off lane for multiple buildings. This means the three lanes will be reduced to two with a dramatic increase in residents. It is important to note, that the developer did not present any written materials to show how the ADA requirements would be met.

Among the solutions not tabled by the developer: There could be a drop off lane running through the entire group of buildings, there could be an elevated road (The Whitehurst Freeway exists because of the similar conditions in another part of the

city), the developer could step the building back another thirty feet so a drop off lane is established. The developer, who will never live in the neighborhood, does not care. This would remove square footage they will make money on. I believe the developer was being very honest when the answer to this question was "we do not care, we have enough votes to get this through the commission". As a citizen, this is not the answer I expect when we are reviewing a preliminary design.

Since the Metro stop is on Fourth Street, most of this development is three to six blocks to a metro. By this stage in the development plan, these problems should be fixed, and if not, they should at least be discussed in an open forum so the community knows the risks it is accepting.

**Adverse Impact on Emergency Services.** Most alarming, the developer did not explain how emergency services would be adversely impacted. This is important as our community is home to several facilities/apartments for the elderly and many young families. Also, no location for the emergency services was identified, nor proposals for fire hydrants, building siamese connections, etc...

**Building Height:** In addition to the traffic problems discussed above, the proposed height of the buildings will block sunlight from our very old growth trees in the neighborhood. This jeopardizes the public health of the community since the trees remove pollution and provide oxygen. In addition, most of the existing buildings in the area were designed to use solar heating and lighting. The lack of sunlight will make the buildings colder in winter, and if the trees die, warmer in summer. This lack of sunlight causes an increased utility cost for the inhabitants of most of the buildings in the South West Waterfront area.

The facts of L'Enfant's plan remain true today as they were in 1800 -- we are trapped between the river and the national mall with only Maine Avenue as a quick route in or out of the neighborhood. The city has invested in the M Street corridor. The commuter route from Northern Virginia and Montgomery County to the M Street Corridor is Maine Avenue.

In summary: this is a once in generation chance to develop one of the most valuable pieces of waterfront real estate in the nation. The current proposal is deeply flawed and community input was ignored.

We urge the Zone Commission not to give variances at this time. We should learn from the past. As a community, the waterfront mall was a disaster. It took nearly 30 years to fix it. Under the proposed plan, we as a city and community are destined to repeat the same mistake with profound consequences.

  
John D Hayes

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