



WATERSIDE TOWERS RESIDENTS ASSOCIATION (WTRA)

TESTIMONY
to the
District of Columbia Zoning Commission

Case Number 11-03
Southwest Waterfront 1st Stage Planned Unit Development and Related Map Amendments
Public Hearing July 18, 2011

Who We Are

The Waterside Towers Residents Association, Inc., (WTRA) is incorporated to act as a neighborhood improvement organization dedicated to promote the common good and the general welfare of all the residents in the Waterside Towers residential complex, and to work for civic betterments of all such residents, all other residents of the wider neighborhood of Southwest Washington, and of the entire District of Columbia.

Our members occupy residential units directly across the street from Parcels 6 and 7 in the proposed Hoffman Madison Waterfront plan. Immediately along Maine Avenue, between 6th Street and 7th Street SW, starting at the Arena Stage and running up to the Riverside Baptist Church, our members occupy a row of twenty townhouses. The WTRA has recently won a court ruling enforcing the tenants right to purchase these townhouses. This property is going to continue being used for residences. So we are very interested in possible zoning changes and developments affecting the residences along Maine Avenue and the waterfront.

On this same city block, back to the corner of 6th Street and I Street SW are three high-rise towers that contain 414 residential units. Because of the views of the Washington Channel, Hains Point, the Potomac River and Virginia, the tenants on floors four, five and six pay a higher price than the tenants on floors one, two and three, and the tenants on floors seven, eight and nine pay an even higher premium price. The WTRA members living in the Towers are especially concerned about the loss of the views for which they pay a premium.

ZONING COMMISSION
District of Columbia

CASE NO. 11-03¹
EXHIBIT NO. 70

Overall comment

Our members voted in favor of economic development of the waterfront, but they wanted me to tell you that the Hoffman Madison Waterfront plan presents too much density and congestion for a residential neighborhood and that we believe the plan is so aggressive that it is not in the best interests of Southwest Washington.

We have looked forward to this for so many years. We are disappointed by what we see planned. The community thought we all agreed to a plan in 2003. This new plan is unacceptable. The size and scale of the buildings is not suitable for a residential community. Remember, the block of Maine Avenue between 6th Street and 7th Street SW is lined with residential townhouses and is going to continue being used for residences. This is a residential community. The planned addition of so many buildings, so many businesses, three hotels and crowds of transient people is not in keeping with a residential community.

We expect our commissioners to vote to retain the integrity and the zoning of our Southwest community.

Buses Maine Avenue

Please stop the use of Maine Avenue between 6th and 7th Streets SW for the parking of tour buses. These buses currently park right outside our members' living room windows and just under their bedroom windows. These are private homes with balconies and patios only a few feet from where the buses park all day long. The noise, heat and exhaust fumes, in addition to the loss of privacy, must be stopped, please. We saw that Hoffman Madison was thinking of moving the buses elsewhere. There are plenty of streets over by Buzzards Point and other areas. Please move the bus parking area away from all the residential streets in Southwest, including Maine Avenue.

Traffic on Maine Avenue

Currently, Maine Avenue is a highly congested street, although generally the speeds are appropriately slow. Yes, there are commuters during rush hour. If the plan is to reduce the number of viable lanes each way on Maine, insert a trolley, and add more traffic lights, we do not see this as a good thing. The commuters will have to divert to some other street. Will they start using I Street? There are schools and residences along I. For our part, the WTRA members use Maine Avenue to get in and out of our homes. So we disagree with the plan to make driving on Maine so very difficult.

We want to point out that the heavy traffic on Maine is not entirely due to commuters. We see heavy traffic and heavy parking all along Maine Avenue from 6th Street to 9th Street for Arena Stage events, bar and restaurant patrons, tennis matches and the fish market. Adding three hotels, a music hall, a graduate school, three hotels, offices, businesses, and tourist attractions is just going to increase the pressure and congestion in this area.

For these reasons, we are opposed to the additional height of the proposed buildings, and if the height is kept at the 2003 level we are opposed to making the buildings more massive. We are telling you the plan is going to put too many residences, too many hotel rooms, too many people in this thin sliver of land and it will disrupt all the existing residential uses.

Set-back from Maine Avenue and docks

We urge you to require a matching 37 foot set-back for grass and landscaping on Maine Avenue for Parcels 6 and 7, which are across from the residences where WTRA members live. The residential appearance should be the same tree-lined streets on both sides of Maine. This is one of the key elements to the charm of Southwest DC, what sets this area apart from the urban streets in the downtown sector.

Additionally, we urge you not to allow a trolley or vehicles on the dock side of the new buildings. Currently, visitors and residents enjoy a lovely promenade along the waterfront and marina. Please do not discard the promenade. Please continue to zone this for pedestrians only.

Height, size and shape of the buildings

Currently, Maine Avenue is a waterfront boulevard with views of open blue sky and lots of natural light. We are skeptical about the design of the buildings. We think that the sun will essentially set behind the buildings in mid afternoon. Maine Avenue will be shrouded in shade. Standing on the street level, especially on the residential side of Maine Avenue between 6th and 7th, where our members live, a person will be in shade and will not see blue sky to the west.

With the Hoffman Madison Waterfront plan, all of us, including all visitors to the city and everyone who walks or drives along Maine Avenue, will lose the gorgeous vistas.

Conclusion

Development of the waterfront is an opportunity to make this area of our community a showcase for America. That is not what we see in this new design by Hoffman Madison. We could make the waterfront a central point to the city, especially as it currently draws people from all over the metro area to the fish market and Arena Stage.

Instead, this new design is destroying the opportunity with boxey buildings. The proposed buildings are not substantially different than any other city block. The size, shape, height and mass of these buildings will destroy the aesthetic potential of Southwest Washington. By changing the traffic flow and increasing congestion, as well as by adding so many buildings and nonpublic spaces, the plan will close off the waterfront and separate it from the rest of the District. We are concerned that the buildings and the views across the street will be exclusive to the people who are in those buildings, not those of us at street level or in the Towers in our community.

Thank you for your time and your kind consideration. We urge you to retain the 2003 plan and the current zoning.