

**Testimony before the DC Zoning Commission**  
**Re: McMillan Park Reservoir, Zoning Case # 13-14**  
By Jim Schulman, AIA  
631 E St., NE, WDC 20002  
c: 202/544-0069; RegionalArchitect@gmail.com  
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Dear Chairman Hood and Zoning Commission Members,

My name is Jim Schulman. I am a Registered DC Architect and I currently serve as a Board Member and Treasurer of the Building Materials Reuse Association, an organization very much in support of adaptive reuse. I am a member and supporter of both the Friends of McMillan Park and DC for Reasonable Development. Thank you for this opportunity to let me share my views regarding the McMillan Park project.

My understanding of the ruling of the DC Court of Appeals (DCCA) in this case can be summarized as follows. The Court said: “Zoning Commission and Mayor’s Agent, have the applicants go back and ~~explore alternatives.~~” This call for the District to re-evaluate this project represents a huge opportunity to reset a flawed process and build a much more successful project - a project that could be an international tourist destination on par with a UNESCO world heritage site or the High Line in New York - instead of a prosaic and poorly-serviced town center.

Here is how I read the Applicant’s March 13<sup>th</sup> response to the DCCA: VMP says: “There is no alternative.” Of course it is in the developer’s pecuniary interests to say that, but the position does not hold water. Holland & Knight offer not a single piece of evidence that the project would be made financial unviable by, for instance, reducing building heights, providing more affordable housing, providing substantially more open space, or preserving and restoring more of the underground cathedral-vaulted caverns. Their only attempt that I can see is their argument that with two stories less the medical offices will fail to attract a tenant – but that fails to qualify as evidence. Have they produced economic studies that show they can attract tenants only at a certain price point and lease area, much less anchor tenants? My understanding is that the Washington Hospital Center in the last year decided to build additional facilities elsewhere - at Ft. Totten!

I believe the Applicants and the District Government aren’t able to seriously consider alternatives as the DCCA has demanded because, by not seriously examining the full opportunities offered by this unique site, they’ve painted themselves into a corner.

Within VMP’s latest document submission DDOE calls for the employment of solar power that is not shown in the plans. Similarly, the Metropolitan Police Department has identified potential traffic difficulties at North Capitol and Michigan Avenues which the transportation planning for this project fails to address.

The McMillan sand filtration plant was an engineering marvel in its day, capped with a 25-acre Olmsted-designed park – the first in the District to which all races were welcome. It is the D.C. version of Angkor Wat, the Cambodian waterworks. Both the park and the water plant are part of our cultural heritage, yet our government attempts to placate citizen concerns with their impending destruction with the inclusion of an upscale supermarket and a smattering of affordable housing. In endorsing this and other trade-offs the Mayor and Council place commerce before culture – and diminish the District’s

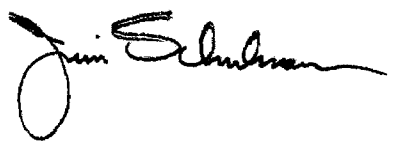
future social and economic potential. Washington needs to become more like Barcelona in that city's embrace of creative design culture. Unfortunately, the best design element in the current plan - the water feature at the South end of the site - as the Commission should recognize - was plagiarized from design alternatives developed by Urban Designer and Catholic University Professor of Architecture, Miriam Gusevich and her students.

I've attached images of creative re-uses of an underground cistern in Houston to help the Zoning Commission appreciate that DC can achieve far better than the VMP designed project.

I recommend that the Zoning Commission ask the applicants and DMPED to take a step back and reexamine their mix of uses and design in light of continuously expressed community concerns. The ~~point of drawing plans is that, unlike actual construction, they can easily be scrapped.~~ <sup>\*</sup> ~~Yes, the community would like a grocery store, but as has been mentioned here before, the public would also like~~ ~~to see a creative reuse of the existing underground caverns. I still believe that the current design~~ ~~dishonors the historic role and highest and best use of the site. Demolishing 94% of the underground vaults is based on a mistaken 20<sup>th</sup> century presumption that the site has to bear the dynamic weight of heavy vehicles. As has been demonstrated by the structural engineering analysis of Susan Burmeister, P.E., of S2B Structural Consultants in testimony before the Mayor's Agent, repairing and utilizing many more of the existing cavern vaults, is feasible.~~

The VMP proposal still fails to meet the basic terms of its own Master Plan which calls for "the preservation of a majority of the structures both underground and above ground and/or adapted for ~~incorporation and reuse in the proposed development. I urge you to direct the District to use creativity~~ ~~existing cavern vaults to repair, reinforce and utilize far more of the existing~~ ~~land use elements of the Comprehensive Plan because it uses extensive~~ ~~low-impact development (LID) techniques. Yet the existing sand filtration plant is~~ ~~already a massive cistern!~~ <sup>\*\*</sup>

I thank you for this opportunity to share my views.



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"incorporation and reuse in the proposed development." I urge you to direct the District to use creativity - with a more responsive development team if needed - to repair, reinforce and utilize far more of the existing cavern vaults. Interestingly enough VMP argues that the proposed PUD will be successful in addressing environmental impacts covered in the land use elements of the Comprehensive Plan because it uses extensive low-impact development (LID) techniques. Yet the existing sand filtration plant is

In this Friday, Dec. 16, 2016, photo, the exhibition of an abstract-video installation called "Rain" by Venezuelan artist Magdalena Fernández is projected inside a former water reservoir dubbed the "Cistern" in Houston. Once eyed for demolition, the former water reservoir built in 1926 has now found new life as a public space that's also serving as an unusual canvas for art. The reservoir's rebirth is the latest example of efforts by cities around the country to reuse and repurpose abandoned and dilapidated pieces of infrastructure as public spaces. (AP Photo/David J. Phillip)

