

TESTIMONY
of
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to the
Office of Zoning, District of Columbia
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I have spoken here before — but that was at a time when I was a novice to the ways of the government of the District. A time when I assumed that my government would represent the best interest of the People. A time when I assumed that my government would have the wisdom and the ethics to know what was in the best interest of the people and the courage to act upon it.

As I have been party to the ill-conceived VMP plan, and as I have watched the complicity of the District Council, and other departments in forcing the plan, I have learned otherwise. That is why I am here today.

I submit this testimony as a participating member of DC for Reasonable Development, and as a member of Friends of McMillan Park. Their concerns are — and reflect — my own.

McMillan Park is a high unobstructed 25-acre site. One of the most organically beautiful in the NW sector of the District. It has views of the monuments of Federal Washington, and benefits from westerly breezes that often accompany sunsets. It has historic significance.

I walk the perimeter of the site imagining the beauty and joy that access to a fence-less, re-stored and re-purposed park would bring to the People. I think of McMillan as a respite place for us, apart from the tourist-dominated Mall. Then, I am shocked back to reality considering the monoliths that the VMP plan would erect juxtaposed with the low-rise residences of the neighborhood.

Consider these points of the plan: it privatizes public land for private gain; it creates private streets on public land; it destroys spectacular view sheds (except for private buyers of high rise apartments), for private gain; it creates unplanned-for strains on water flow and infrastructure; it allows the erection of non-sustainable buildings; and, it exacerbates a traffic nightmare in a hospital environment.

I have time for just one of these points: the environmental impact. Ah-ha, but you don't know what that would be because an environmental impact study is not done until permits are issued. How amazing is that? Totally backward. But, I know. I know that there have been zero requirements for sustainability. LEEDS measures have been "intended", where green roofs should be mandated; solar and wind energy sources required; concrete streets are planned where all surfaces should be permeable.

The tactics used by the developers in concert with this government are particularly alarming. Specifically those intended to silence the voice of the People. Transparency is not a political instrument, it is a required tenet of democracy.

Over 8,000 mostly hand-written signatures on an opposing petition should not be thrust aside as meaningless.

Ironically, perhaps, I come from the corporate world — from Wall Street and from corporate board rooms. I can attest that decisions made at the conference tables where I have sat were based upon fact, upon the law, and always dictated by our determination of the best interest of the shareholders. I would have thought that government would be similarly driven — but even more so, because our democracy depends upon it.

It is equally interesting to me that no development plan for McMillan that has emanated from the office of multiple mayors has been implemented — since its purchase in 1987. Isn't that significant? Isn't it clear that the plans have never represented the best interest of the community? Isn't it clear that **developers' interests still drive development decisions in the District** — instead of the other way around?

We have a Comprehensive Plan for a reason. We have laws and we have regulations. But, we have a Government without vision. One unforgivable breach of the Plan would be to dishonor the concept of a linear system of parks and open space. Just to find the meager six acres proposed would require navigating newly privatized streets. That is not linear. That does not constitute a Central Park, and that certainly is not the "gem" envisioned as part of the original Emerald Necklace.

You sit as one Board that consistently breaks or waives its own regulations and rules. As you have in the case of McMillan.

The really sad part of the willingness to waive restrictions is — to what end for this City? We have a massive corridor on Massachusetts Avenue of high rise monolithic buildings. Not a tree in sight. And, not a sustainability feature in sight. In fact, not a person in sight — just cars.

We have another monolithic strip of buildings in SW — even worse because they have taken the Potomac riverside. Not only does that development take access, but it has taken views. Long views of the Capitol and other monuments have all but disappeared throughout the City. Have you noticed that?

And, still we have not solved the housing needs of lower income residents. Shame on this City.

Here is my want: and you should be thrilled to fulfill it : to make McMillan be different.

I want McMillan Park to be the best designed 25 acres in the District. I want the community to plan its day around McMillan: A morning walk on the promenade; a latte in the split-level coffee shop. A little painting time in the community center, or a seat to watch action on the ice rink or the ball diamond. Shopping at the new underground grocery store, beyond which one might learn a little something about hydroponics. A place where we can entertain visitors; a place where — —- just fill it in.

Here is my ask: The best way to make this happen is to create a public conservancy. That entity will do the rest at zero cost to the City. Imagine that: a best-use outcome for the people at no cost to the City. Much like a real Central Park.

And, consider, at your leisure:

Bomb shelters in London are being converted for subterranean agriculture

Ghost stations in the Paris underground are being converted to community pools

Underground ruins in Australia are being converted to hanging gardens

Defunct power plant in Seattle was developed into a popular Peoples park.