

My name is Carole Lewis Anderson

I am a US citizen; I am a resident of the District; I am an Independent voter; and, I was taught as a child the Power of One.

Unfortunately, with the growth of population and the increased power of money, civic governance has become distanced from the people. That has become increasingly clear as I have learned more about the Mayor's plan to develop the McMillan Sand Filtration Plant site.

I remind anyone listening to this testimony that the Mayor, the implicitly-conflicted members of the Historic Preservation Board, members of the city council and its tributary commissions all work for me and our fellow taxpayers.

So:

McMillan Park should not devolve into a mass of high rise buildings that would, in effect privatize land currently owned by the taxpayers. Why?

This site was envisioned as a state-of-the-art water purification solution, with a roof of open land -- part of the Emerald necklace of open natural land that Pierre L'Enfant, James McMillan, Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr., Augustus St. Gaudens, and others understood was necessary for a healthy urban environment. Hundreds of District residents recall stories of parents and grandparents playing and living on this land, creating what was the first, and only at the time, integrated park. That place and history are worth restoring.

The site houses truly extraordinary caverns -- unique in the city and beyond. I cannot think of another urban center that would not embrace these structures as unique and iconic. We know, from activities in other capital cities, that such subterranean structures can be effectively repurposed in creative, useful ways that are being embraced by their respective communities.

Rather than looking for creative reuses, our former and lame-duck mayors have hired large developers to create the best plan for the site. Really? Did anyone believe that Trammel Crow, EYA, or Jair Lynch would devise a creative best use for the land in the interest of the people and in keeping with the atmosphere of the neighborhood? There is nothing creative or aesthetically inspiring about this work -- it has one purpose: to produce the best financial return. Aesthetically, the VMP plan belongs in a desMoines suburb, not on this high open land of the Nation's Capital.

Around the globe, last remaining urban sites such as this are being re-stored, re-purposed, and re-habilitated. They are bringing new vitality to these cities: the New York High Line is a good example. The London Ferris Wheel is another. [These exciting new places -- saved and/or developed as places of exploration and relaxation for the public -- generally were the result of ideas and design competitions.]

By contrast, with VMP we seem to have a non-bid construction project growing out of a close-to-the-vest bid for a design consultant.

In summary: The citizens of Washington own 26-acres of high, cool land with open southwest views, and 20 subterranean acres of cool caverns. The historic use of the land is important enough to keep it in the hands of the public. The surface should immediately be assessed for safe occupancy, so that the fence can be removed. No construction should be undertaken that would necessitate the destruction of the caverns, which could be used for urban agriculture, grocery and farmers markets, bistros and music venues, community pools and other creative uses. A true competition should be undertaken to determine the best uses of the land, keeping it open to public.