

Anthony Hood, Chairman  
DC Zoning Commission

May 5, 2014

Subject: Testimony in Opposition to proposed McMillan Park Development

Dear Chairman Hood:

I am writing to express some contention with the development at McMillan Park. There should be greater consideration of the current plan to increase the amount of public space. We would not want to look back and see the lion's share of the public benefit lost to all the current and future residents of the District of Columbia and citizens of the United States and other nations of the world, now and for the ages. The McMillan site is unique. Because the potential adaptive reuse of the underground McMillan caverns could be brilliant and iconic. The potential for adaptive reuse of this one-of-a-kind asset deserves memorialization.

The population of DC in 2012 was 632,323. Annually, roughly 85,000 people visit the DC as tourists. These numbers will continue to grow. If every DC resident visited the property developed as a world class park once a year for ten years the McMillan site would be used 6,323,000 times. This is a fraction of the people that could enjoy this property as a park over the ages. Given the foregoing numbers of public space users would not the lion's share of the site's highest and best use be a public space? The commission should consider increasing the percentage of publicly accessible space.

DC needs housing and economic development. However, one does not tear-down a potential Taj Mahal to build housing and stores. The Catacombs of Paris and Rome, the Eiffel Tower, the Colosseum in Rome attract and increase economic development. People all over the world visit these perennially. The McMillan site could be monumental with the correct adaptive reuse. We would not tear down Dunbarton Oaks (to build 146 townhouses) even if all the units were affordable housing. Even affordable housing (townhomes) would be misplaced at McMillan. Because such uncompressed private parcels would lock-out millions of public users for a small amount of private users in perpetuity. There are many sites that do not contain intrinsic and irreplaceable features ripe for adaptive reuse such as Capital Riverfront, Dakota Crossing, Poplar Point or Arbor Place on New York Avenue, to name a few. DC can meet its noblest goal of affordable housing goals at sites like these. We can see the value of MORE park space. The Yards Park is actually superior in every way to the shoed-in park on the Georgetown waterfront. Yards Park makes the Navy Yard area breathe with river breezes for all, life and laughter. The Southeast Waterfront is a lasting destination because of the Park. We know that NOMA worked because it was redevelopment of a light-industrial area into large transportation oriented mixed-use. There was a consonance of previous and future uses. At McMillan Park there isn't a dissonance of previous and future uses, there appears to be a conflict. Indeed, NOMA lacks a green space destination to sustain the interest of people – who will eventually leave just a few blocks with stores. People want amenities like grocery stores etc. But they love parks and they stay generation after generation because of these mixing places.

Why would DC sacrifice a potential Catacomb and nationally renowned park to be enjoyed for the ages? The adaptive reuse of McMillan Park will generate more economic development and improvement in quality of life. It is a question of balance. Increasing the amount of public space makes sense. As I understand it, the proposed plan fails to take into account the Summary of Recommendations for Site Revitalization of McMillan Park (DC Office of Planning, February 2002), a city-led effort to identify community priorities for the site. The current plan excludes key recommendations of the study: "A minimum of 50% (approximately 12.5 Acres) of the McMillan site should be revitalized as publicly accessible open space."

Surely, it is sensible and merited to preserve the character of the property and enhance the same with a design that provides for greater public space. The people of DC desperately need open green spaces to enhance their quality of life. These spaces are the reason people are attracted to city, stay in the city, have families and sustain tax revenue. The development should be more balanced and yield a minimum of 50% of the site to public space. We should choose enhancing McMillan into an iconic public asset (our Catacombs) that brings the intrinsic value of the site to the most people. That would make it 'a place for everyone'. Such an increase in open space will only make the mixed-use development more eternal and vibrant.

Sincerely,

Matthew McCombs

ZONING COMMISSION  
District of Columbia  
CASE NO.13-14  
EXHIBIT NO.393