

Saint Augustine Catholic Church & School

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Good Evening and thank you for the opportunity to make a statement on behalf of Saint Augustine Catholic Church whose campus exist almost entirely on V Street between 14 and 15th Streets N.W. including directly across from the current Portner Place Apartments whose re-development we are discussing this evening.

My name is Fr. Patrick Smith, Pastor of Saint Augustine Catholic Church on 15th and V streets NW. First and foremost, I want to offer my support and that of our parish community to the residents of Portner Place Apartments! I in no way tonight speak for them but only want to stand in solidarity with them for they represent what too often feels like an endangered species in the District of Columbia: families in affordable dwellings living in the city. For the more than 10 years that I have served as pastor of St Augustine Church, I have lived right across the street from Portner Place. I have also witnessed, as most of us have, the extraordinary and rapid development that has taken place over in the last decade in this neighborhood including the building of market rate housing in the form of condominiums, as well as restaurants, grocery and appliance stores and the like.

We at Saint Augustine church are encouraged by the plans to nearly double the affordable units at Portner Place and want to offer our support to the residents of Portner Place that if we can be of any assistance to them in assuring that every resident and family being relocated during the construction of Portner Flats has a place to return to upon its completion, then we are offering it tonight. In a word, we want to be a good neighbor to them in every way that we can.

As a church in the neighborhood, one of our most important contributions in the past 50 years (on V Street) has been the running of a vibrant and thriving elementary and junior high school that has served DC residents from the neighborhood and throughout the city. Schools are populated by children from families. Families living long distances from the church where they worship on Sunday's are less likely to enroll their children in the neighborhoods where they worship preferring to enroll children closer to where they live and work. If housing units for families are not being constructed to accommodate families then naturally they will be left with only the option to look elsewhere. We want to be sure that families have the option to live in the neighborhood. We price our school deliberately to be accessible to working class residents.

This is why in the ongoing housing plans for neighborhood development, two to three bedroom apartments for workforce or middle income families AND even families prepared to pay market rate need to be a viable option in rapidly changing neighborhood; lest the un-posted bill board at the different gateways into Ward 1 read "Families need not a apply" – even those that could afford to pay market rate! My hope and prayer is that the process of residents and developers working together continue to guide this latest effort to develop housing for families that deserve to be a permanent part of our neighborhood.

Thank you.


Fr Patrick A Smith
Pastor