

Public Opposing Testimony
Claudia Barragan
DCBZA Public Hearing, Brookland Manor Case 14-18A
Wednesday, March 16, 2017

Good evening, my name is Claudia Barragan, and I am providing testimony as a DC resident and a seasoned Urban Planner and an Environmental Policy analyst, with over 15 years of experience in Urban Design and Planning, and another 5 years in environmental justice and social equity advocacy. Professionally in urban design I have solely worked for companies such as Torti Gallas and for developers like Mid City. I am also an immigrant-woman who was raised in a single-mother household with 4 children, and lived in low income housing communities like Brookland Manor. I am living proof that Mid-City's application assertion that concentrated poverty perpetuates cycles of poverty is WRONG! And devalues my own existence and that of communities of color in the District. It is a racist and unfounded assertion that must be removed from the application. Racist, xenophobic and discriminating statements like Mid City's should not warrant an approval from this Zoning Board.

As an urban planning professional, I want to reiterate and agree with all the testimonies in opposition that you heard and MUST read and include in your deliberation. The approval of the First-Stage Order was done with biases and ill-employed urban design principles. It basically allowed you the zoning board to create a clean canvass for further marginalization of communities of color, immigrants and low income residents, who pay taxes and are vital to this city. Ward 5 Residents like me. It certainly neglects fair housing mandates, and comprehensive plan equity mandates in its entirety. But let's face it this board approved that stage and therefore wants to or caresless if this project displaces, resettles and marginalize communities. If this were the UN we would be talking about human right infringements. The fact that housing for all in cities is a human right! So I will now refer to the applicants request and block 7 in particular.

Mid City the developers, say they are continuing with this discriminating and prejudiced master plan, to address 3 urban planning problems in this community:

1. Buildings are too old. Yes we all agree and according to OHR and housing human rights mandates the building owners must renovate it, at the very least for public health concerns, such as air quality, lead in water, etc. The commercial strip did offer ethnically diverse food options, displacing business due to ethnic discrimination, is wrong.
2. Urban Design is obsolete. That is not true, it is obsolete for high end market value housing. Garden style apartments are still very common and in fact the design accommodates for mixed families. Elderly people are able to walk up to their units, children do not get lost in a sea of hallways, there was plenty of space for children to play within the buildings, until management caged off the green areas, and handed out fines for playing on the grounds. Low density garden style apts creates opportunities for community monitoring. Mid City paints a racist picture in their description, and redefines "defensible space" according to the standards of white rich men. The existing street patterns around block 7 do not create bad vehicular access. As a frequent driver and pedestrian, I can travel around this block without problem. I would like to ask for accident records and there are zero dead end streets other than service roads.
3. Urban design does not have the authority to attempt to end intense concentrations of poverty. Urban design, planning and architecture are not social engineering tools. If Mid City wants to end perpetuating cycles of poverty, then they should focus on hiring and achieving diversity within

their own company. They should invest in improving the condition buildings for the sake of the community's public health, asthma, diabetes, etc. Which would entail creating several community centers, parks basketball courts, and even an educational use within their first stage approval. Deconcentrating poverty by using gentrification and further fragmenting families and black/brown communities, is not responsible urban design nor architecture. It certainly isn't stated as a mandate in the comprehensive plan. Therefore, it is racist and discriminatory for this board to approve this PUD under those statements.

As per the 6 solutions offered by Mid-City, in relation to block 7, this is my professional advice and testimony:

- 1- Technocratically, it is easy for mid-city to preserve a one-to-one, affordability in this block because at 4 stories high and nearly doubling its number of units, they can equate the units, but they are not accounting for the number of families and children and seniors who live in the 64 (3 bd) apartments. The phasing plan doesn't say how many existing families will be relocated and how many seniors will be relocated and kept united. Mid-City is resettling 100% of 3 br apartments to only building 15% in the new construction. That should not warrant your approval. Its deceitful.
- 2- This block is farthest away from the main road, and as a professional I know that location to the main corridor is the most valuable. This is attempting to marginalize the 200 unit seniors (I assume most of color) to a block that lacks accessibility. This is segregating future residents, and therefore not creating a mixed-income community.
- 3- Open Space in this new plan is a joke, in block 7. Where is allocated open space in this block? The backyards of townhomes do not count as public open space. The developers/designers failed at providing proof of sound open space per community planning standards.
- 4- This property block is not closest to the transit and amenities in terms of easy pedestrian access along Rhode Island Avenue. That is reserved for the high-income residents in future PUD's.
- 5- Finally, per Mid City statement, First Stage approved a total amount density for block 7 of 3.0 FAR. This proposal is offering 2.97 + 2.98 for a total of 5.95. Doubling the original approval. This PUD cannot be approved,
- 6- Us ward 5 residents want to know how long in the future will building B be kept for senior independent living? The developers must state that in this PUD.

Thank you for allowing this low income upbringing, women of color, who was raised in poverty but is now proof that poverty is not a cycle or an ailment. Instead it is a reality and a consequence of greed and a wealth gap. It can be addressed by including moral values to architecture and urban planning, rather than using it as a tool to marginalize, discriminate and displace our communities of color.

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