

Testimony on behalf of Showing Up for Racial Justice DC (SURJ-DC):

February 23, 2017

Case 14-18A

- Good evening, members of the Zoning Commission, my name is Julia Hubbell and I'm here to testify on behalf of the DC chapter of SURJ (Showing Up for Racial Justice). Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you this evening.
- SURJ-DC was formed in 2015 as part of a national network of groups and individuals organizing White people for racial justice. Through community organizing, mobilizing, and education, SURJ moves White people to act as part of a multi-racial majority for justice with passion and accountability.
- Today, SURJ-DC stands in full support of the demands of the tenants of Brookland Manor.
- At the heart of our work to stand up and name racism happening through policies and practices in DC is a desire to ensure equitable outcomes for all DC residents, especially long-time residents who are people of color, whom the District has neglected for so long.
- With the glut of wealth moving into the district and creating an affordable housing crisis, Zoning should not approve any plan that reduces or eliminates affordable housing options for our families.
- In particular, we support the tenants' demand that Zoning reject any plan whose harmful consequences disproportionately affect the city's people of color and working class, as Mid-City Financial's current plan so clearly does.
- If Mid-City Financial is committed to "the production of new affordable housing is essential to the success of neighborhoods," as they have previously stated - why does their plan reduce the size and number of affordable units?
- If Mid-City Financial is committed to "supporting land development policies that create job opportunities for district residents with varied job skills" - why won't they won't accept the tenants' demand to train and hire local workers?
- On the contrary, Mid-City Financial has used both language and actions (such as the private police force) throughout the process to glorify gentrification and criminalize low-income residents.
- They argue that low-income residents contribute to crime, while simultaneously championing the idea that their project provides public housing. They argue that no one will be displaced, while also acknowledging without dispute that they will reduce the size and number of affordable units. Any language about increasing the "safety" of the area is nothing but a coded reference to reducing the number of low-income residents and displacing families.
- Unless the proposed development includes 535 family-sized units at current subsidy levels, opportunities for employment, and the ability for families to stay in place during development, then it will directly contribute to the displacement of families, the increasing unaffordability of the District for the residents who built it, and the racist effects of replacing

affordable family housing with luxury studios, contradicting the stated goals of Mid-City Financial and the District of Columbia.

- The commission must weigh different types of perceived public benefit against each other – if we say that new economic, gentrifying development is sufficient “benefit” to make up for the reduction in affordable housing (which the zoning commission has acknowledged as a real consequence), what does that say about the values of this city and its trajectory moving forward?
- The zoning commission has an obligation to act and interpret the law in the way they believe is truly best for their constituents and the existing dc community – this means that Zoning Commission members have an opportunity to take a stand on behalf of these residents and to define the way that this city acts on affordable housing moving forward.
- Tenant demands are not incompatible with the **stated** goals of mid-city financial (development of new architecture, green space, transportation safety, environmentalism, etc.)
- SURJ-DC stands with the tenants of Brookland Manor in full support, and calls on Zoning to oppose any redevelopment plan that does not include the tenant’s demands.
- Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of the tenants of Brookland Manor.

Tenant Demands

- · Zoning should not approve any plan that discriminates against families by eliminating large bedrooms.
- · Zoning should not approve any plan that is facilitated by the forced displacement of residents through underhanded tactics such as a private armed police force.
- · Zoning should not approve any plan that is facilitated by the forced displacement of residents through the erection of fences that restrict the freedom of movement of disabled persons, and that restrict the ability of residents to move freely around their own community.
- · Zoning should not approve of a plan that proposes to eliminate affordable housing in the midst of an affordable housing crisis.
- · Zoning should not approve of a plan that will result in the displacement of working class people of color in order to make way for luxury apartments while thousands sleep on the streets.
- · We support Brookland Manor tenants in their reasonable and viable demand that the redevelopment preserve 535 units of affordable housing at the same bedroom sizes and current subsidy levels.
- · We support the Brookland Manor tenants in their reasonable and viable demand that they not be displaced from the property during the process of redevelopment.
- · We support the Brookland Manor tenants in their reasonable and viable demand that they gain access to employment opportunities through the rebuilding of their own community, which they have a fundamental right to be a part of.
- · We implore the Zoning Commission to block this development from moving forward, until or unless Mid-City Financial immediately stops engaging in intimidation tactics to force tenants off the property.
- · We implore the Zoning Commission to block this development from moving forward until or unless Mid-City Financial fundamentally changes their current plan to incorporate Brookland Manor tenant demands.

- In Zoning guidelines, it makes clear that any plan that is not considered a “community benefit” should not be approved. Any plan that does not cede to the reasonable and viable demands of Brookland Manor tenants cannot be considered a “community benefit” and should therefore not be approved.