

I am a resident of a condo on 13th Street, SE, that will abut the Watkins Alley PUD once it is built. Some neighbors and I have attended some meetings to discuss this project, including an informative discussion on Monday, Feb. 22. My neighbors & I learned a lot about the project & came away with the following thoughts & expectations. We thank you for your consideration of them as you review the PUD application. We are sending this "comment" document to you now, even before our ANC votes on it, to ensure that our concerns are heard. We generally support the Watkins PUD project but believe that aspects of it haven't been thought through well yet.

Our first comment is that it's hard to think about many issues related to this project without thinking about the coming development of the Bowie property on E Street next door to the OPaL PUD project. The two projects will have significant interactive effects on each other & on the lives of the people on our block. The projects have different timetables & developers but are organically part of the same whole: sitting on opposite sides of the same alley.

That the two projects are part of the same whole is not only because they projects are contiguous & because the residents of each will share vehicular & pedestrian routes, but also because we have been told that the Bowie (or Insight) project's 160 units will bring almost 4 times the number of units (& residents?) into the middle of our block as the Watkins project will.

Given what a PUD is supposed to be, we believe the 2 projects should be considered together. However, we aren't asking for a delay in the consideration of the Watkins proposal. We know time is money. But we do hope (if not expect) that Insight people will participate in discussions of the Watkins project so the planning & construction of the 2 projects can proceed as much as possible as one: because, once they are built, they will function as one.

Our second observation concerns "amenities and benefits." Discussions that we have heard thus far have also included "necessities." We believe it's important to distinguish the one from the other. For example, a discussion included reference to improvements to the area around the Metro station. We think it'd be great to have improvements there; but we believe it's important to address "necessities" first because there is likely only so much money to cover various project expenses.

We believe the following are necessities:

1. The north half of the north/south thru alley must be widened, during construction of Watkins Alley or by its completion. Because the current alley width allows for just one vehicle at a time, it dams the flow of vehicles and pedestrians & is a danger to the latter. It will also slow construction. Additionally, once Watkins is built, the alley must be accessible to Fire Department vehicles responding to fires & medical emergencies. The current alley & turn space at mid-alley are too small to allow this & the absence of set-backs creates blind spots for all traffic. This problem must be solved asap. As an agenda item, it isn't an amenity.
2. Parking rules must be enforced & the police must be involved in all relevant project discussions. The police are not now enforcing parking rules in our network of alleys. This concerns the parking of DOT worker cars & all other vehicles (e.g., the cars of project & other block residents, vehicles belonging to plumbers, electricians & others who service townhouses & condos, & the guests of block residents).
3. We thank the Watkins developer for the pedestrian pass-thru on E Street but worry about resulting safety & security issues. Provision must be made to protect pedestrians and property. Alley width is relevant here as are security cameras (& emergency phones?) & clear signage giving directions to people on foot & stating parking prohibitions. Signs stating such prohibitions are particularly important on the backs of the townhouses that back on the east/west alley if those townhouses have back doors. The current plan is allows for open access; that is, anyone can use the pass-thru: residents and workers on the block and everyone who wants to walk through it. Signage about how construction stages will affect folks is important. It would be useful if people who use the alleys have some advance notice of when parts of the alley system will be unavailable to them and for approximately how long. Also, good signage & pavement markings are critical for delivery & service vehicles in the end of the alley by the carriage house to alert potential buyers of the house that they are likely to have trucks outside their door and windows from time to time. This will help to minimize complaints & keep the house owner from trying to block the use of the alley in front of his/her home.

4. We thank Commissioners May and Turnbull for raising the matter of the garage opening location at the Commission's November meeting. As Commissioner May noted, the plan's current location for the opening is as far from access to a street as can be. We believe that locating the ramp

to the garage to face E Street will significantly mitigate vehicular & pedestrian issues, especially when Insight starts building the Bowie project. Giving exiting drivers a one-two car length distance to check for folks on sidewalks (& good signage) should protect them. There are buildings that do this & there aren't problems. The garage opening at Harris-Teeter is a good example. The Watkins architect might move the underground garage to the west (to under the courtyard?) to accommodate changing the garage entry.

5. Finally, we look forward to knowing that discussions involving Watkins & Insight people & DC govt (including ANC representatives & police & fire departments) discussed our ideas & what & why they decided what they did. Of course, we wouldn't mind being invited to such meetings.

Submitted on 2/27/2016 by:
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