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From: Galina Sergen <galinasergen@gmail.com>
Sent: Monday, October 18, 2021 3:50 PM
To: DCOZ - ZC Submissions (DCOZ)
Subject: We oppose replacing Bruce Monroe Community Park with a 9-story-plus-penthouse tower.

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DC Zoning Commission:

We oppose replacing Bruce Monroe Community Park with a 9-story-plus-penthouse tower. (Case 16-11)

The city's new Comprehensive Plan requires a thorough impact assessment for new developments - ensuring that negative impacts on neighborhoods, transportation, environmental quality, and other issues are assessed and adequately mitigated. The DC Appeals court made clear that a thorough impact assessment was not done for this development.

We have lived on the 700 block of Irving Street, NW, for over 25 years. In that time, we have seen many changes to the neighborhood and our community. We have witnessed the increase in diversity across all demographics and the growth of urban densification. We wholeheartedly support the District's commitment to the provision of safe, sound, affordable housing. However, we also strongly believe that wise urban planning must provide ample green space so that the crowded and busy lifestyles we lead do not become claustrophobic and unhealthy. The solutions we apply today shouldn't become tomorrow's problems.

When the old Bruce Monroe School was torn down, we were a community in transition, and crime had been a serious problem. There were fears the park could worsen the problem if it was a large, unlit area at night. But instead, the community came together, and the park became a place that contributed to the community's health and well being. Now, there is a place to let off steam and play basketball and tennis, to sit and chat in the pergola, to walk our dogs, to let our children and grandchildren play on the swings, and for people to come together to work and share produce from their gardens. The park is a space in this city that is full of joy.

At both the national and local levels, we sometimes pretend in Washington, DC, that our problems only have binary solutions. We tell ourselves stories that limit our choices based on money and power that are not rooted in fact. We create false choices between "housing for low-income residents" and "green space for the middle class" when neither scenario is actually what is at stake. The allocation of affordable housing across the District is poorly monitored and even more poorly enforced. The same people responsible for that failed enforcement are the same leaders now seeking to divide the

community by accusing those who would protect green space for everyone of being "against affordable housing."

The idea that people on low incomes don't also need green space is a poverty of thinking that drives continued inequality. Because we know the pressures that economic inequality puts on our poorer residents, and because we know that poverty is a key determinant in who will suffer higher rates of mental illness, and because we know that green spaces can help alleviate mental distress – we should be ensuring that access to parks through all sectors of our city, not just the wealthy enclaves of Kalorama and Georgetown, are preserved.

The District struggles to increase urban densification because of height restrictions and urban planning laws restricting subdivisions and other creative town planning options beyond squat apartment towers. These are issues other large capitals worldwide have had to solve through centuries of development from London to Paris, Berlin, Moscow and Rome. Sometimes they got it horribly wrong, and we can learn from those mistakes. The push for affordable homes in Victorian London led to massive slum developments, an absence of green space, and subsequent public health crises. Those homes were demolished en masse after the Second World War to modernize and upgrade affordable housing but led instead to the type of housing program we see proposed on the site of the Bruce Monroe Park: apartment towers with bits of green space so poorly designed for light and shade that nobody is able to enjoy them. They have become blights on the cityscape of London, concentrating people with low incomes into identifiable addresses that generate unlimited resentment as the buildings age and the inequalities remain unresolved. They confirm what we already know to be true in development; once the green space and parks are gone, it is almost impossible to get them back.

We also know, from our own hard-won experience in this city, that concentrating poverty and wealth into their own enclaves only leads to further problems. We have tools and spaces, and options to increase access to affordable housing. We need to remember that affordable housing is an economic issue, not a space allocation one. We have built environments up and down Georgia Avenue that could and should be redeveloped; there are vacant buildings on the city's own ledgers that are wasted space ripe for good development. We know that serious incentives for affordable housing options added to tax and financing laws could properly address this issue – all we currently lack is the political will.

Only a government of the people can establish parks that endure. The pressures of development, economics, and the next financial quarter will always run against setting aside a space for people to relax and enjoy. The words of John Muir, the American Environmentalist who worked with Theodore Roosevelt to establish Yosemite National Park, are as relevant now as they were a century ago:

Everybody needs beauty as well as bread, places to play in and pray in, where nature may heal and give strength to body and soul.

We have many options to provide truly affordable housing; we do not need to destroy a vibrant and much-loved park from a community that has finally come together to enjoy every aspect of it.

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