

**Testimony of Gail Fast, Chair, ANC-6D**  
**Before the Zoning Commission of the District of Columbia**  
**RE: ZC No. 17-05B Modification of Significance of Order No. 17-05 and**  
**17-05A for 2121 First Street SW (Square 613, Lot 10)**  
**June 22, 2020**

Good afternoon Chairman Hood and Zoning Commissioners. I am Gail Fast, Chair of ANC 6D, representing Southwest, Navy Yard and Buzzard Point.

At a regularly scheduled and properly noticed public meeting on December 9, 2019, with a quorum present, a quorum being four Commissioners, Advisory Neighborhood Commission (ANC) 6D voted 6-0-1 to oppose ZC No. 17-05B Modification of Significance of Order No. 17-05 and 17-05A for 2121 First Street SW (Square 613, Lot 10) and voted 6-0-1 to authorize me to speak today.

As we stated in our Report, ANC-6D believes that this Modification of Significance should be denied because the Applicant has not sufficiently demonstrated that the change is in concert with the original concept that had been put forth and subsequently approved by this ANC and the DC Zoning Commission for a rental apartment building. In both their Statement of Support and Pre-Hearing Submission the Applicant

submitted to both the Zoning Commission and ANC 6D, they described the project thusly:

*“The residential component anchors the site and is **thoughtfully planned with its future residents in mind.** The upper floors of the building are designed to capture the views of the Anacostia River to the south and the planned Stadium to the north of the Property, as well as other monumental views in the vicinity of the Building. The rooftop is designed to provide a respite for the residents: complete with a pool and pool terrace, as well as a roof terrace facing the Anacostia River. The Building is designed with multiple courtyards as well to provide open spaces and views. **In all, the residential building will provide spaces that appeal to a range of tenants and provide the opportunity for passive recreation.**”*

As ANC-6D wrote in our report, this is not just any apartment building. The Applicant is constructing 485 units of market rate housing located on, arguably, the most beautifully situated and valuable piece of property on the Anacostia River. And of those 485 market rate units only 8 – count them – *eight* – of those units will be affordable.

In a city where every single elected official loudly laments the lack of affordable housing -- In a city where our own Comprehensive Plan establishes the basic premise that “the city must grow more inclusively to achieve its full potential” -- In a city where our Mayor launched her second Inaugural Address embracing her strong commitment to housing equity and affordability -- **Eight affordable units out of 485 market rate units is beyond a disgrace.**

**The District Department of Housing and Community Development also recognized that the Applicant was using temporary lodging as a means, and I quote, “to establish a higher rent market where one does not exist.” They requested the Applicant provide additional IZ units so that a greater measure of affordability would be retained. (Office of Planning Report dated March 27, 2020).**

Now, this Applicant has asked for a Modification of Significance as a hardship. Really? What *is* a significance is that this Applicant has already been significantly advantaged by their ability to construct matter-of-right. No PUD was required here. Had it been, this would have been a very different project. In addition, they *and* their investors are further advantaged by being in an Opportunity Zone, which under DMPED’s own priorities for investment require:

- Delivery of new, neighborhood-serving amenities, such as retail and fresh food grocers
- Provision of investment capital and growth opportunities for DC small businesses, particularly those led by underrepresented entrepreneurs
- Creation of jobs for DC residents and pathways to the middle class
- Increasing affordable and workforce housing

While I believe that the ANC has established that 8 out of 485 does precious little to increase either affordable *or* workforce housing, it strains credulity that either Akridge or any of their partners in this project are struggling entrepreneurs. Nor does it make sense that the the largest retail tenant, who promises to build the city's fanciest fish restaurant (not exactly a neighborhood-serving amenity) – and already owns a chain of great restaurants, is the region's largest fish purveyor and sits on the board of Eagle Bank -- is an underrepresented entrepreneur. Moreover, the addition of 100 units of luxury hotel – even with a friends and family discount – is not a neighborhood-serving amenity that is in any way required. We already have fifteen new hotels located within the boundaries of our ANC -- more than enough to meet our community's needs.

Let's get real here.

While we are navigating through the COVID-19 pandemic, it should be

recognized, that on a city level, there are many hotels that are struggling and need help –many have properties that are still vacant.

To Whom Do We Owe Allegiance? Those whose sweat and struggle are in jeopardy; whose workers may not have jobs to come back to?

ANC 6D has no quarrel with the WhyHotel concept. However, by allowing the Applicant to put a hotel on site, regardless of the fact that it is temporary (which was at the ANC's specific insistence), it simply lowers the availability of apartment units in the building and will keep rental prices of the remaining units artificially high. This certainly will do nothing to increase either affordable *or* workforce housing.

So, while the Applicant claims that the addition of the WhyHotel will help them ease the pain of leasing up 485 units of market rate housing, it seems to ANC 6D that this additional benefit to them provides absolutely no benefit to the wider community and is, alone, sufficient reason for the Applicant's request to be denied.

One further point, if I may: Should this Modification of Significance be granted – and we hope that it will not be – ANC-6D strongly believes that it is time that they put their money where their mouth is. If the Applicant wants to significantly change the project that they'd originally proposed, then they *must* be required to make significant changes to

the benefits they provide to the wider community. ANC-6D humbly proposes that should this request go forward, the Applicant be required to provide a healthy percentage of their vacated hotel units to be made available for workforce housing so – at long last -- the Applicant’s own description of “a building that will provide a range of tenants” will come to pass.

That concludes the ANC’s testimony this evening. I look forward to answering your questions.