

Testimony of Gail Fast, Chair, ANC-6D
Before the Zoning Commission of the District of Columbia
RE: ZC No. 20-14, Design Review, 5 M Street SW
(Sq. 649, Lots 43-45 & 48)
October 1, 2020

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

As stated in our report filed with the Zoning Commission, ANC 6D voted 7-0-0 to oppose Zoning Case No. 20-14, Design Review, 5 M Street SW and authorized me to speak today in opposition to the Applicants mixed-use project that may or may not be replaced with, in their own words, “a similarly designed, but modified alternative.” They have stated that they need this flexibility due to the extreme uncertainty of market conditions as a result of the ongoing pandemic. We disagree.

ANC6D, to borrow a phrase we anticipate will again soon become quite popular, believes that this is a bunch of malarkey. What this *is*, however, is a way to bypass any future opportunity for ANC 6D to comment and refine the alternative residential scheme. As you will hear in our testimony, and have read in our report, this is this Applicant’s modus operandi -- to push their project through at any cost – as long as it is at no cost to JBG Smith.

It should be noted that at the same ANC 6D public meeting where the Applicant presented their project, Brookfield Properties followed with a preview of their latest project. Brookfield’s Parcel F is located **just four blocks from the Applicant’s** and will have more than 270,000 sq. ft of office space and 10,000 sq. ft of retail. When ANC 6D asked why they chose to deliver on a 100% office building on spec, Brookfield’s answer was, “We know we can do it.”

So why is it that *this* Applicant requires such extraordinary flexibility on this site even though their property is located on one of the most valuable corners in Southwest?

It was always our expectation that the Applicant would develop this site with greater regard for its unique position at the eastern end of M Street, SW. While JBG Smith may believe the project reflects the site’s important gateway location, ANC 6D would argue it does not.

Ever since Anthony Williams and Andy Altman presented their Anacostia Waterfront Plan and introduced the concept of a new SW Waterfront to the Southwest Community, M Street was

proclaimed to have a design as a Grand Boulevard whose easternmost portion would start at 11th Street, SE, cross S. Cap. and end at the SW Waterfront. As one can see now along M Street, The Wharf has been designed in its second phase and their property has been *specifically* placed so as to have a head-on view of the water from M Street. Accordingly, ANC 6D believes that the plan has been all along to have M Street as a broad welcoming grand boulevard which we believe should include a structure at the juncture separating Southeast and Southwest that more clearly marks a change in neighborhood marking more office and mixed use to a more residential neighborhood.

And the Office of Planning agrees. Just read page 11 of their report.

Instead, the Applicant has delivered a jumbled, busy scheme that includes a Hollywood Squares themed commercial space, resembling a residential prison replete with illuminated retail facing the oldest sanitary homes in the District of Columbia.

Regardless of the claim by the Applicant that consistency within the Small Area Plan is not required as part of the design review process, Square 649, Lots 43-45 & 48 is located squarely within its boundaries as detailed on page 14 of the SAP. The Small Area Plan is not and ought not to be -- in any way -- subsidiary to the interests of the Applicant simply because they say it is not.

The Small Area Plan Executive Summary states:

“Southwest today is the product of successive waves of change building on what existed to create new forms and new communities. Preservation and growth can be compatible as exemplified in the stunning Arena Stage Theater. It is the perfect mix of historic and new construction to better accommodate growth and demand.”

And as with the Arena Stage complex, the same may be said of the Randall School development – also conceived by Bing Thom. And while the Applicant’s challenged our comparison to the Randall School, ANC 6D put forth the Randall School development not as a representation of buildings that border S. Cap, but to illustrate other major buildings that incorporate their structure within the Southwest Small Area Plan. Randall School is an open concept building that opens their property to the surrounding community – specifically the adjoining Capitol Park IV townhouse community. Those wonderful buildings were designed not separate and apart --- they were *designed* to be **a part** of our Southwest Neighborhood.

The Small Area Plan's vision calls for "... the preservation of its unique architectural legacy and supports new development that reflects the form and rhythm of the mid-20th century, reinforcing the neighborhood design as a 'Modernist Gem.'"

And while the Applicant claims architectural elements that were "inspired and influenced" by some of Southwest's most prominent modernists, what they have extracted from the masters, sadly, is little more than a hodgepodge of design elements that result in an incomprehensible amalgam that ultimately is representative of nothing.

They claim both schemes incorporate Chloethiel Woodward Smith's floating volume, framed masonry and wide balconies; Charles Goodman's horizontal and vertical articulations; and Keyes, Lethbridge and Condon's reveals in massing and captured masonry as design elements in both schemes. However, it's easier to claim than capture.

And while the Applicant may consider what they've come up with is precious, it is most definitely in the rough, uncut, unpolished and certainly no gem -- modernist or otherwise.

The Applicant also claims their project provides a mix of heights however when all **they** do is scale back from 130 ft to 110 ft, it is at face value – laughable. And while the Pavilion in the mixed-use scheme does incorporate a lower elevation, should the Applicant choose to develop the residential-only scheme, the Pavilion's height almost doubles eliminating any transitional feature to the Southwest neighborhood.

Now let's talk trees. Simply put, the Applicant's claim that they embraced Design Principle #4 by relocating the Heritage tree to a more beneficial location with the District of Columbia is simply checking a box. Heritage trees have unique value which is considered irreplaceable. If the Applicant had done their homework, they would have learned that PN Hoffman **spent more than \$100,000 to relocate a gorgeous** heritage tree from St. Augustine's property into Phase I of the Wharf development – only to have the tree die after being replanted. ANC 6D remains rooted that the Heritage tree and Special Trees remain in their current location and that the Zoning Commission follow DDOT's recommendation requiring the Applicant to re-design their project around the trees.

In 2020, anything less than LEED Silver would be an embarrassment so we are happy to see both schemes comply. And with all due respect, as it pertains to the flood resiliency diagram (Figure 1

on page 7), the Applicant states that they **are now only “working”** with DOEE to ensure the building is fully compliant with current regulations? While the Applicant claims that the building has been designed so the residential slab is elevated above the flood plain, ANC 6D would like some clarity on how that is possible for the residential “townhomes” that are located along Half Street and accessible into each unit directly from Half Street?

In addition, the lighting scheme provided at the 24th hour does not fully describe how **its** articulation may alter the design elements that we see in daylight. Along M Street, the site is directly opposite the oldest sanitary homes in the District of Columbia. The majority of their retail will reside on M Street towering over these 2- and 3-story homes. Across South Capitol Street, the site faces St. Vincent de Paul, the oldest church in the neighborhood. ANC 6D also wants to ensure, as we have done in previous cases regarding signage on Van and M Street, SE, that their parishioners are not confronted with either signage or lighting that would be untoward.

And while the Applicant has stated that they will “restrict” neon lighting on the building, they have not provided any guarantee or confirmed a final lighting scheme. Further, the ANC is uncomfortable with the Applicant’s “no neon lighting” verbal pledge as we have been misled on previous projects such as the Meridian, the Kelvin and especially the Novel, where each night the magnificent view northward along South Capitol Street toward the Capitol Dome is marred by a 130-foot iridescent blue slash. We strongly request the Zoning Commission require an exquisitely precise lighting scheme complete with proper renderings to ensure that such an architectural travesty never again mars such a world class view.

In closing, as important as is the hardscape, Southwest’s most defining characteristic is its people. Our residents are steadfast in their desire to maintain the economic and racial diversity that makes Southwest so strong and vibrant and that is why ANC 6D was compelled to file our Supplemental Report regarding the lack of affordable housing (even at the level of IZ) found in the Applicant’s pre-hearing submission.

Accordingly, ANC 6D requests the Zoning Commission postpone any decision on this project at this time and require the Applicant to continue to work with ANC 6D and the Office of Planning to refine their design to better reflect the tenets of the Small Area Plan and also **strongly encourage them to work** with ANC 6D to proffer a fair and just affordable housing component.

That concludes ANC 6D’s testimony. I look forward to answering your questions.