

# TENAC

June 25, 2023

To: DC Zoning Commission  
RE: U Street Development, Case 23-02

Dear Commissioners:

We at *TENAC (DC Tenants' Advocacy Coalition)*, as the oldest citywide tenant advocacy group in the District, and member of the *Coalition for Affordable Housing Not Luxury Housing!* herein state our opposition to the proposed giveaway of the public property (the police station and firehouse) and public land at 1617 U Street, NW to developers. While supporters of this giveaway contend it will provide affordable housing, in reality, it will not. It may provide a few units as a token for public relations purposes, IF and only IF developers don't circumvent the requirements by requesting waivers, variances or claim cost overruns - - the usual methods of operation. And IF the mayor doesn't waive affordable requirements that it just isn't "practicable" for developers to do so. In reality, no affordable housing is practicable for the mayor, her administration, or for any developer. And the excuse of why it isn't practical will be many - - all exaggerated and false. The only real excuse hidden underneath all the surfacey excuses will be that the project won't make huge profits that are far and away greedy, obscene and an insult to DC residents.

We have seen the effects of hyper-gentrification the District is experiencing, aided by the essentially freely donating public property, land and resources to private developers who neither need nor require in any way these gifts to build multimillion dollar developments.

Developers contend that they need these gifts "to make a profit" as an incentive. But in reality the only thing they need these gifts for given at taxpayer expense is not for profit, or reasonable profit, or excess profit. It is to make obscene profits.

These are multimillion dollar companies that cry "free market" against government "interference" in the housing market in the form of rent control, public housing and other protections against their malicious and unfair practices. But when it comes to their own aggrandizement, they use government assistance and interference freely and often - - and to the extreme. They engineer legislation to grant themselves public land, public property and other resources that include tax breaks, assistance, subsidies, zoning variances and more as the present case before the Zoning Commission illustrates.

In light of their adamant adherence to free market principles for others, we urge the council and zoning agencies to pass up this free bonanza. We urge lawmakers to instead require developers to purchase the land, property and resources they want for free at fair market prices

**D.C. TENANTS' ADVOCACY COALITION**  
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instead. (According to appraisals for U Street, more than \$30 million.)

There is no longer need for such developer freeloading and public officials' free giving. The District has come out of its budget crises, emerged stronger from its experience under the control board, and has rebuilt after the devastation caused by the riots of the 1960s. There is no longer a dire need or a crisis that requires public assistance to developers to rebuild and restore a distressed city.

An argument can be made that government interference is necessary to revive the central downtown district racked by COVID. But this is not true for areas above downtown. Not in the already hyper-gentrified areas of Logan Circle, Dupont or U Street. Astonishingly, the mayor's proposal for downtown is more extreme than anything ever proposed: the abolition of tenant protections, tenant right to buy and other key protections against unscrupulous landlords. All this makes a borderline horror story for renters and the 99 percent, but the dream of the mayor, most officials, and their developer cronies. While the expression "never fail to make the most out of a crisis" is really intended as advice to take crises as an opportunity to do good, the excuse used for the crisis downtown amounts to the opportunity to never do good to anyone but the wealthy and to heap onto developers everything imaginable - - from the abolition of renter rights, government assistance in unheard of amounts to developers, more welfare for the rich, and countless other anti-people, pro-profit goodies that developers and public officials, looking for huge profits and payoffs, dream of.

However, the problems and solutions for downtown are an argument for another day. But government assistance, especially in the form of the giveaway of taxpayer resources to line the pockets of developers, under the guise of providing an end to the affordable housing crisis is not needed. And it is especially not needed for areas above the downtown business district that are already gentrified. It is an idea whose time has passed. But developers and public officials can't stop pouring the punch. It is TENAC's desire, as member of the U Street Light and Air coalition to stop these excesses on U Street as well as in other areas. If not, the only question is, where will it end, when and how bad will be the hangover?

Sincerely,

Robert Leardo  
Co-Chair

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