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November 19, 2023

re: DC Zoning Case 23-02

Chairman Hood and Commissioners,

I am a longtime resident of Corcoran Street NW in Dupont Circle and a past President of the Citizens Association (DCCA). I work as Director of the Library Renaissance Project, a non-profit organization founded in 2002 to protect and promote the public interest in the DC public library system.

**I write in opposition to the proposed upzoning of 1617 U Street, NW.**

First and foremost, the city's already limited public land should not be surplussed or otherwise disposed of. It is critical to the continued provision of public services, green spaces, light and air and other elements of a vibrant city.

The reason given for upzoning is to address the affordable housing crisis. The same amount of affordable housing that could be delivered on an upzoned lot in a private, for-profit development, could and should be achieved using social housing model currently being legislated in the DC Council. That model requires use of publicly owned land in order to be viable, and since we are unlikely to acquire more public land, the city should use the public space at 1617 for a pilot development along social housing lines, incorporating the public facilities already there, and more as feasible, such as a library. Since the housing crisis was brought on by doing things one way – by private means – while at the same time demolishing public housing, the need for something different is clear. Otherwise, it's the proverbial banging of our taxpayer heads against the brick wall of private development and its voracious appetite for tax abatements, give-aways, and other costly incentives.

A development encompassing the existing need for public services at this address, as well as affordable housing, could be achieved under the current allowable height. Note that the buildings on site now fall far short of that already allowable height. Importantly, keeping to a height lower than that proposed by this rezoning, but higher than buildings there rise to now, would help bridge the difference between the historic districts that surround the lots in question, thereby continuing to highlight and educate the public about the history these districts were created to honor. And preserving what is in fact a significant draw for the community: its treelined streets of charming buildings and walkability.

Perhaps most importantly, the public not been consulted or included in planning for a development on this public land. There has been no public discussion of financial analysis of the options or of specific considerations needed for public facilities like the police station that now exist there. For instance, it is not clear that privately owned residences over public facilities are a good match. The West End Library is an example of how this arrangement can fail – birds fly into the library via the mesh curtain to the private commercial cafe next door, an indoor solarium space provided because the urban location has no outdoor space has never been activated and remains closed to patrons, and flooding from an overhead apartment rendered the library unusable for two months, more than a year ago, recently closing again this fall for a week to repair ceiling lighting that had been damaged.

I also commend to you the testimony submitted by Kerry Kemp with its links and duly researched notes. I wish to associate myself with her comments and recommendations.

In sum, 1) no public land giveaway (which upzoning increases the pressure to do), 2) affordable housing can be built on the land as it is zoned currently, and 3) extensive and inclusive public planning is needed before any zoning change is contemplated and then only for a plan endorsed by the community at large.

Thank you for your attention.

Respectfully submitted,

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