

Sheila Bunn Testimony in Opposition - Case Number 23-29, Martins View, LLC

Good afternoon, members of the Zoning Commission and fellow community members in attendance. I am Sheila Bunn, a native Washingtonian and 44-year resident of the Bellevue neighborhood residing on Elmira Street, SW. I also serve as Vice President of the Bellevue Neighborhood Civic Association.

I appreciate this opportunity to speak to you today regarding the proposed Martins View redevelopment project in Ward 8 on Martin Luther King, Jr. Avenue, SW. While we wholeheartedly support our neighbors at the current Martins View receiving the very needed amenities and upgrades this redevelopment would bring to them and our community, we want to express my deep concerns and opposition to the scale and size of this redevelopment project.

The Bellevue neighborhood, with its rich, unique, and local identity, is asking the Zoning Commission to hear our concerns and give us the opportunity to impact the design and size of this project. We applaud the developers for their community engagement on this project, however, the developers have been unwilling to compromise on the scale and size of the project given the community's expressed concerns that this proposed largescale development will overshadow the modest homes that have been standing for generations, create more traffic congestion and exacerbate an already tenuous parking situation on Martin Luther King, Jr. Avenue, Elmira, Forrester, Darrington, and Danbury Streets, SW.

1. Increased traffic congestion and limited parking

This project proposes 821 residential units, more than tripling the number of current units in this low-rise development, and only providing 273 underground parking spaces. Although the District is working toward getting as many cars as possible off our roads, it is unrealistic to think that all of the remaining 665-unit renters will walk or use public transportation and not have a need for personal transportation in this area. Furthermore, other residents should not have to pay for RPP because of this project and the planned renovation of adjacent Leckie Elementary School at the same time for the next five to seven years.

2. Preservation of Community Character

In addition to the parking issues, we face the loss of our wonderful skyline view and the encroachment of our green spaces - elements that make our neighborhood unique and inviting. The proposal calls for five stories and a penthouse, comparable to the height of the Bridgepoint Hospital next to it. This will potentially obstruct our view and sense of openness leading to Martins View and Ft. Greble Park.

Bellevue is known for its unique character and close-knit community. Large-scale redevelopment projects risk eroding this character by introducing high-density housing and commercial spaces that do not align with the existing neighborhood's aesthetic and cultural fabric. Development should enhance and preserve our community's unique identity, not undermine it.

3. Relocation of Long-term Residents

The Martins View redevelopment plan, as currently proposed, will relocate current residents on-site or to an off-site location of their choosing during construction. While this plan will cut down on displacement out of the ward, questions remain as to what fees and utilities returning residents will have to pay. Further, it is unknown whether returning residents will be able to afford the additional costs of parking that may be imposed on them upon return.

4. Affordable Housing

The current proposal plans for approximately 821 new residential units. It seems that some units may be designated as affordable, but it is unclear as to the overall number and affordability levels of these units. Further, the market rate cost of the non-affordable units has not been mentioned nor data presented that there is a market for 665 additional units.

5. Strain on Infrastructure and Public Services

Our existing infrastructure and public services are already under significant strain. The influx of new residents without corresponding improvements to schools, transportation, healthcare facilities, and other essential services will only exacerbate these issues. The Bellevue neighborhood, like so many on the East End of the District, is in a food desert, lacks many basic amenities and too often delayed city services. Adding an additional 665 or more residents could worsen this situation.

Conclusion

In conclusion, while we welcome and understand the need for development and growth, it must be done thoughtfully and inclusively. The current Martins View redevelopment proposal does not meet these criteria in terms of scale and size. We urge the Zoning Commission to consider the community's concerns and revise the plan to address the aforementioned issues. Thank you for your time and consideration.