

There is a Greek proverb that says, “A society grows great when old men plant trees in whose shade they shall never sit.” It is hard to think of a more appropriate way to begin my remarks than with that quote. I have been a resident of Brookland since 2011, but my house was built in 1954 by a married couple who served as Black foreign service officers in a time when that role was still an uncommon occurrence. Brookland as a neighborhood was founded in 1887, but I wish to point this committee’s attention to the 1950s and 60s when the Federal Highway Administration decided to route the North Central Freeway right through our neighborhood because there would be no “substantial relocation of persons.” But at the time, Brookland was a thriving Black community where thousands owned homes, including Howard professors, doctors, teachers, and government workers of all stripes. Those neighbors fought for years and ultimately won in court against the demolition of their beloved community. Of *our* beloved community. Whichever side of the 901 Monroe St Development anyone sits, but for that opposition, none of us would be here.

So it is there I begin my remarks because we owe one another, we owe this neighborhood, we owe our ancestors and elders and the future generations the intelligence and wherewithal to plant trees under which none of us will sit. It is this obligation that requires us to demand what is best for the neighborhood. That is all any of the 200-footers have ever wanted. It is all we have ever asked for. It is what we will continue to demand of this development.

I have been attending meetings about this iteration of 901 Monroe since last summer. Since that time, the 200-footers have made active attempts to dialogue about our concerns regarding the project, and also attempted to engage in constructive conversations about amenities that may not only mitigate the impact of the construction and the building on our current living environment, but also to introduce new recreational opportunities for the entire neighborhood to

enjoy. The 200-footers compiled a survey which provided the 901 Monroe Development team with prioritized amenities and others that were shared by a multiplicity of people but not voted in the top 3.

The response to our concerns is woefully inadequate and at best seeks to kick the can down the road. Now we have reached the end of that road. The hearing. And unfortunately, our concerns about retail and amenities remain unaddressed.

For example, the idea of “studying” the land on which Colonel Brooks Mansion rests as a potential greenspace opportunity offers nothing concrete either immediately or in the future. It is difficult to understand why conducting the study regarding the development of ground that the Development Team does not own (and will likely never own) provides any benefit to the community now, in the future, or ever. This is particularly true since that land is subject to its own development controversy. Promising to study this land is therefore nothing but lip service. Yet in response to the 200-footer’s request for some type of green space (whether a park or a community garden or some type of gathering place), this is what we have been offered—the promise of a study with results that are not even remotely actionable. This is not an amenity. This is Lucy pulling the football away from Charlie Brown.

Next, what is happening with the retail spaces has been shifting sands. First, the Development team did not plan for any retail. Then, the development team was considering some type of live-work arrangement. It remains unclear how any of that will work. In the meantime, the Development Team is offering approximately \$125,000 to local charitable organizations (Deaf Reach, Casey Trees, Greater Brookland Intergenerational Village, and Washington Area Bicyclists Association, and for a study of the Colonel Brooks Land). Since there is no plan for the retail, I asked the Development team during one of our meetings if they had spoken to any of

these entities regarding lease arrangements to activate retail spaces. Each Development Team representative indicated that they had not considered it, and would look into it. Then moments later, the representative from Greater Brookland Intergenerational Village indicated that they *had* indeed asked for space and been told “no.” Several of the organizations indicated that they planned to use the money (whether it was \$15k or \$25k or whatever) for capital improvements on the properties they currently occupy. The Development Team seems committed to either experimenting with live-work arrangements that they have acknowledged exists nowhere else in DC, or hosting empty retail while providing minimal financial support to local organizations.

With regard to the alley: It is difficult to imagine that, in the history of Washington, DC development, no other development has run into an issue where the alley DDOT requires for ingress and egress also has neighbor driveways directly across the alleyway. And it is additionally difficult to comprehend how, after months of insistence that this alley is the only ingress and egress point available, that the development group has zero ideas for amenities available to mitigate this significant new harm to the neighbors. Indeed, during our meeting just two weeks ago, they told us that they do not “own the affected property.” We certainly understand who owns the affected properties—200-footers—and as homeowners, parents, residents, people who work at home, community members, we are trying to work together with the Development Team to resolve this significant new harm. The Development Team is comprised of knowledgeable and sophisticated individuals with decades of experience between them. One would think they could brainstorm solutions instead of falling back on excuses.

When our concerns about safety and quality of life and destruction of the character of the neighborhood we love are met with this laissez-faire “just get over it” mentality; this “just live with it” response, it further erodes any foundation upon which credibility can be built. Trust is

crucial to this project—not only now, for it demonstrates how the development team will respond when inevitable issues arise with the construction. If this process so far is any indication of the Development Team’s ability or intent to respond, it appears that our concerns are unlikely to be remedied in a timely manner, if at all.

We are extraordinarily divided right now as a country, and I am disappointed to hear that a microcosm of that divide has occurred even during this process because I understand that some of our neighbors have styled the 200 footers NIMBYs. Nothing could be further from the truth. It is the 200-footers who have advocated for this development to offer more affordable housing, more senior housing; guaranteed retail and office space for the very charitable organizations mentioned in its proffer package; not to mention a neighborhood greenspace where we can gather together. I want to believe that we all want a right-sized development on this property that enhances our neighborhood, and my hope is that we are all too sophisticated to believe misinformation campaigns intended to divide us as neighbors. Please hear me when I say that we are fighting for the same thing—the very responsible, neighborhood enhancing development that the neighborhood says it wants—and it is disheartening to know that some who we pass on walks, who we wave to every day, or who we chat with at the farmer’s market, have entirely dismissed our concerns as selfish.

Responsible development of this, or any property, requires a modicum of trust between the development team and the neighborhood. Unfortunately, this process has been rife with irregularities and a lack of candor that has impeded the building of credibility with the 901 Monroe Development Team and the 200-footers. This construction is scheduled to last at least two years. That is two years of construction noise, heavy equipment, traffic, and several other impediments to the quality of life that the 200-footers, yes, but it will impact this entire

neighborhood. We will all be required to endure it, after which time, the 200-footers will be living next to an overly tall and poorly designed box that robs us of sunlight; introduces significant hazards due to increased foot and vehicular traffic; and increases the number of trucks that come to the area exponentially. This is our only opportunity to do what our ancestors and elders did to ensure that there would even be a Brookland to fight over—have our voice heard by this reasonable and august body. So let us all strive to leave a legacy we can be proud of in this moment. Let us work together to plant trees under whose shade we will never sit.