

July 6, 2025

Mr. Anthony Hood, Chairman
Zoning Commission
441 4th Street SW, Suite 210
Washington, DC 20001

Re: Testimony of Support in Case 24-15

Good evening, Commissioners. My name is Joseph Keller, and I am a Brookland resident and member of the "200 footers" speaking in opposition to the current proposal—not because I oppose housing or our community's economic goals, but because justice demands we do better.

There exists a fundamental reason why policies protect those who suffer disproportionate negative impacts in our society. History demonstrates that broad popular opinion from those who do not experience direct consequences often struggles to understand the lived reality of others. These vulnerable populations typically lack the platform, opportunity, or resources to advocate successfully for themselves, particularly when they constitute a minority.

We have established laws and policies specifically to ensure their voices are heard and responded to, even when they might be overwhelmed by louder, more resourced interests. This development project continues that troubling pattern by undermining the agency and voice of those who will bear disproportionate negative impact. It remains critical that this vulnerable minority receive due consideration regarding building height, community amenities, and the creation of safe alley passage.

I understand that a racial and equity lens was applied to this PUD analysis. If accurate, then something essential was overlooked: justice. Justice represents more than an abstract concept—it constitutes a practical virtue that should guide every community decision we make.

Let me be specific about what justice requires here. First, we must acknowledge the troubling issues surrounding incentives, conflicts of interest, and the concerning lack of demographic representation in this process. Why do the proponents of this development fail to represent the rich diversity of Brookland? This question merits repeated examination.

Second, even DDOT has acknowledged that this alley situation exists nowhere else in the entire District of Columbia. Yet the proposed solution follows typical protocol—generic, insufficient, and frankly beneath our community's capabilities. A unique challenge requires a unique solution. We can do better, and we must do better.

While supporting popular ideas proves easy, taking an unpopular stance when you represent a minority proves far more difficult. We must ask ourselves critical questions: Who bears the costs of this development? Who reaps the benefits? Those who are most vulnerable, who possess the

least agency and resources, simply cannot match the advocacy power of those who stand only to benefit.

Justice ensures that vulnerable populations receive protection and that both benefits and costs are distributed equitably throughout our community. The residents who bear disproportionate burden deserve not merely protection, but empowerment through this process. That empowerment has not occurred.

I want to be clear about something important: the "200 footers" are also neighbors. We have been vilified and dismissed as obstructionists during this process. During these challenging times, we are tired, like everyone else. We are trying to raise children while managing federal workforce disruptions that have personally impacted my family. I would much rather not be here defending the legitimacy of our concerns. I prefer advocating *for* something rather than against something.

However, we must stand up for ourselves when no one else will. Our own ANC, on the record, was unwilling to acknowledge that the ANC's agreement to the project contained conditions that needed fulfillment before moving forward. This was incredibly disappointing. It leaves us isolated and vulnerable, while casting significant doubt on whether the ANC will participate in enforcing compliance measures throughout this process.

For the record, I am happy to correct that oversight: regarding whether the ANC supports the 901 Monroe Project, the answer is only conditionally affirmative—provided that each of four specific conditions are met.

I will never apologize for standing up for my family's health and safety. Let me be absolutely clear: intimidation and retaliation will not be tolerated in Brookland. Such behavior is unacceptable, and our community will not stand for it. I encourage this Commission to emphasize this principle as you consider your decision.

Ultimately, our community of "200 footers" deserves justice and agency, not silent acceptance of this development's greatest costs. My 90-year-old neighbor three doors down, who has lived there since 1975, deserves justice. My 3-year-old daughter and her health and safety deserve justice. Most importantly, the community of Brookland deserves justice and the assurance that our most vulnerable residents are protected rather than harmed or exploited by those who stand to profit most.

I maintain a high opinion of this community, which comes with equally high standards. I know we can do better for all Brooklanders. As neighbors, we remain open and eager to work with developers and stakeholders to achieve truly equitable goals for our neighborhood.

We hope to find something together that we can champion—enabling the "200 footers" to become as passionate about this project as its current proponents. We look forward to welcoming our new neighbors, because they will truly be *our* neighbors. However, how we arrive at that outcome matters profoundly.

Commissioners, I urge you to demand more and refuse to settle for weak promises. We ask you to reject this proposal and encourage one more worthy of Brookland—one that acknowledges rather than ignores those neighbors who bear the highest cost. Thank you for the opportunity to speak, and I appreciate everyone participating in this process.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "J. Keller".

Joseph B. Keller