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Reginald W. Griffith

IN REPLY REFER TO:
NCPC File No. Z.C. 96-3

NOV 14 1996

OFFICE OF ZONING
DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
96 NOV 15 AM 11:12

Ms. Jerrily R. Kress
Chairperson
District of Columbia Zoning Commission
441 4th Street, N.W.
Suite 220
Washington, D.C. 20001

Dear Ms. Kress:

It has come to our attention that the Zoning Commission has scheduled public hearings for November 21 and November 25, 1996, to consider Zoning Commission Case 96-3, the Rezoning and Overlay Zone for the Buzzard Point/Capitol Gateway area. Although we normally do not comment on such cases until after the Zoning Commission has taken a proposed final action and referred the case to us, in this instance, we felt it important to share with you some of our preliminary views on the proposal. Hopefully, alerting you of our concerns now can avoid possible negative comments later during the formal referral period.

We wholeheartedly support the city's efforts to redevelop the Buzzard Point/Capitol Gateway area. Encouraging redevelopment of the area complements the Federal government's attempts to enhance the South Capitol Street gateway. Furthermore, the proposed changes appear to be generally in concert with the concepts expressed in the Commission's draft framework plan, "Extending the Legacy", and the Monumental Core Plan's First Initiative. These endeavors call for creating an economically vital South Capitol Street. I have enclosed a copy of the draft plan for your use.

Enriching the Buzzard Point/Capitol Gateway area through the provision of a mixture of uses and the creation of incentives for residential development and "around-the-clock" activities is also supportive of Federal plans to improve the Southeast Federal Center and Washington Navy Yard. We also endorse the requirements for a wide and publicly-accessible waterfront area. Encouraging such an amenity in this area is key to realizing the city's economic objectives and goals related to continuous public shoreline access.

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Additionally, we commend the Zoning Commission for proposing the 60-foot height limitation in the W-2 zone, with provisions for transferrable development rights within the overlay area. This should help preserve the unique scenic resources in the Buzzard Point/Capitol Gateway area. Although bonus densities would permit buildings up to 130 feet in height in the BP/CR and BP/C-3-C zones, we have looked closely at the zoning changes as they affect Fort McNair and believe the requirements limiting heights adjacent to Fort McNair on Second Street to 90 feet adequately address our concerns. As you may recall, the Commission, during its review of the Capitol Point project, was very concerned about the visual and security impacts of tall structures adjacent to Fort McNair.

You will recall in our April 4, 1996, action on Zoning Case 95-7, the proposed rezoning of the Capitol South Area, we identified vistas along the South Capitol Street corridor as a Federal concern. We have similar concerns with respect to the potential heights along South Capitol Street within the Buzzard Point/Capitol Gateway area. Therefore, we ask that the Zoning Commission, as it agreed to do in the Capitol South rezoning, require special vista studies along South Capitol Street as part of the zoning review process for future planned unit development applications in the affected area.

While we endorse the principal objectives of the rezoning proposal, there is one area we recommend you continue to study. This is the provision relating to setbacks along the waterfront.

The Parks, Open Space and Natural Features element of the Comprehensive Plan contains a number of policies related to the Buzzard Point waterfront. Policies in the plan emphasize public access to the shoreline, managing shoreline lands in a manner which protects their scenic values, and eliminating incompatible uses from waterfront areas. Three of these polices are:

> The shorelines and waterfronts of the Potomac and Anacostia Rivers within the District of Columbia should be publicly-owned, except at planned waterfront locations in Georgetown and Buzzard Point where controlled private development could be permitted. Public access along the waterfront should be accommodated throughout, including waterfronts on military properties when security considerations will permit. In non-public waterfront areas, access by the public should be arranged by easements or other binding agreements. All lands within 150 to 200 feet of the water's edge along the Potomac and Anacostia

> Rivers should be managed in a manner that will encourage the enjoyment and recreational use of water resources, while protecting the scenic values of the waterways.
>
> Natural shoreline areas in the National Capital Open Space System should be retained in their natural condition or be appropriately landscaped for a distance of 150 to 200 feet from the water's edge, if possible. Large paved parking areas and other non-water related development should be discouraged within this area. . .

Although the Comprehensive Plan calls for a uniform 150-200 public open space corridor along natural shorelines, we recognize it is not practical to achieve such a wide public open space area along the full length of the Buzzard Point shoreline because of its urban character. Therefore, the 50-foot open space strip called for in the proposed rezoning seems reasonable. We would recommend, however, that the District, in conjunction with private land owners, the Commission, the National Park Service, and others concerned with redevelopment of the waterfront area, develop a coordinated design plan for the treatment of the public space. Language should be added to the rezoning proposal requiring developers of shoreline property to improve and maintain the open space at their own expense.

Finally, we ask that the Zoning Commission consider establishing other appropriate mechanisms (including possibly additional bonuses) that would provide incentives to provide even greater widths of open space along the waterfront than required by the proposed rezoning. The incentives could serve to encourage builders to supplement the mandated 50-foot width in return for development bonuses in other portions of the overlay area. Providing greater depths of open space on the deeper lots could result in additional water-related amenities and avoid a possible rigid treatment of this fairly narrow waterfront space.

Thank you in advance for your consideration of our comments. If you have any questions, feel free to contact us.

Sincerely,

Reginald W. Griffith
Executive Director

Enclosure

cc: Robert Stanton, National Park Service
Jill Dennis, Office of Planning
Richard Turner, Department of the Army