

Cochran, Patricia (DCOZ)

From: Danielle Her Many Horses <dhermanyhorses@indiangaming.org>
Sent: Thursday, April 5, 2018 11:20 AM
To: DCOZ - ZC Submissions (DCOZ)
Subject: Comments regarding Zoning Case 02-38I

I am writing in opposition to the request to change the primary use of the lots at from 4th & M streets SW from office to residential. The current usage of the space is more in line with the guidelines set out in the SW Neighborhood Plan (SWNP) and DC Comprehensive Plan than the proposal put forth by the applicant. For these reasons, I, oppose the switch from office to residential, and recommend the developers meet with additional stakeholders to bring forth a more suitable project for the area.

I have lived in Southwest since 2005. In the past 13 years I have seen my neighborhood go from an affordable, hidden gem in DC to a busy, swanky neighborhood. It has gone from affordable to nearly financially inaccessible. Southwest residents take pride in the economic, racial, and architectural diversity of their neighborhood. Over the last couple of years, residents have witnessed nine new apartment and condominium buildings begin construction or come online. There is more than a sufficient number of expensive apartments and condos. The residential building proposed has the bare minimum of 8% affordable housing at 60% Median Family Income (MFI). Since an individual earning minimum wage would not qualify for 60% FMI, it is inaccurate to consider that as affordable. The fact that only 8% will be considered affordable, and that only a few will be family units, does not meet the criteria of embracing cultural and economic diversity, something very important to the SW community.

The best part of the character of Southwest is that it has some green and open areas for families, children and pets to enjoy. The first-stage Planned Unit Development (PUD) authorized the development of eight buildings on the multiple sites with residential, office, and retail uses, significant open spaces and public space improvements, along with the re-opening of 4th Street SW. With the building of the Eliot in the northwest parcel, the planned building in the northeast parcel, and the buildings at 4th & M, there will no longer be any "significant open spaces" in the area. The importance of open spaces is stressed in the DC Comprehensive Plan, as it states that the retention of, "public access to these assets [functional open space] is important to the well-being of surrounding neighborhoods. By open spaces, the Comprehensive Plan is not only talking about parks, but infill sites as well. SW community members shared their appreciation for the open spaces in SW through the SWNP. The nature and number of developments happening in the area has not followed this principle, and as a result, the large open spaces residents once appreciated are being replaced with large, luxury condos.

Over the last couple of years, the lots at 4th & M have been actively used for regularly occurring Friday night markets, Saturday farmers' markets, and has served as the host space for the 2017 DC State Fair, the 202 Creates Arts Festival, and the 2017 Food Truck Festival. These events have been well attended by neighbors, and have become an important and enjoyable opportunity for residents to connect with one another and support local businesses, organizations, and artists. The proposed buildings will eliminate the possibility of these events taking place in the neighborhood in the future. None of the surrounding parks have the capacity to hold such events. The loss of such a popular and frequently used space will be greatly missed by SW residents, and negatively impact the community.

Guiding principle #10 of the SW Neighborhood Plan states that new development should, “develop a strategy for height, density and open space that enhances, acknowledges and complements the character of the neighborhood.” The plan to build two, 140-foot buildings, making them the largest buildings in the area, while also removing the last pieces of open space from the area is in direct contrast the guiding principle. The SWNP advocated for the corner of 4th & M to be used as a space for recreation, such as pop-up agricultural landscapes, temporary food installations, and community gardens. Neither ground-floor retail, or a community center, of which we already have two in the area, will replicate the vibrancy that has been achieved through the markets, fairs, festivals, and casual lounging that is available currently. For the aforementioned reasons, the proposal does not acknowledge or complement the character of the neighb

The SWNP, as well as the goal of the developers, seeks to turn the corner of 4th & M into a thriving town center with an "active street atmosphere, and a high quality public realm." This is an admirable goal that is welcomed by neighbors. Thanks to our ANCs, the developer, and the Southwest Business Improvement District (SW BID), this area has been activated for the past couple of years, and has achieved the lofty goal. Residents have been able to enjoy the outdoor area for planned events, such as those listed previously, and for casual leisure time. The benches, tables, stage area, lighting, and homages to SW have instilled a sense of pride in the neighborhood and have provided an invaluable opportunity for neighbors to connect with one another.

The proposal plans to replace this space with large buildings that will not contain any space for these activities to occur. The developers incorrectly assume that providing a community center, and ground floor retail will reach, or surpass the current vibrancy of how the space is being used. There are already two community centers in the neighborhood, and residents would rather spend time outside without having to patronize a store. The current configuration is inviting to people of all backgrounds and income levels, and replacing this with a requirement of purchase, goes against what SW residents want.

The current usage of the lots at 4th and M is more in line with the DC Comprehensive Plan than the proposed plan is. The Comprehensive Plan explicitly states that development should, “encourage the provision of spaces for performances and art events in neighborhood parks, community centers, schools, transit stations, residential developments and public areas in private development.” Since the DC government does not have the land or the dollars to completely meet the recreational needs of its residents, collaboration and partnerships, and community resources need to be leveraged to dramatically improve access to open space and recreational services. For this to happen, the definition of “open space” must change in order to meet the threshold the government has set for itself, and must include more than just parkland.

Thanks to the work and benevolence of Forest City, the ANC, and the SW BID, the lots at 4th & M have hosted a variety of markets, festivals, and fairs, all of which were well-attended. Those uses are directly in line with the Comprehensive Plan, as the Plan states, “the programming of outdoor space with events and activities (such as performances, arts, and farmers markets) that stimulate streetlife and active use,” should be encouraged. The Comprehensive Plan states that the retention of public access to the spaces described is important to the well-being of the surrounding neighborhoods. The attendance at these events, and the number of people who have petitioned against this proposal can attest to that. Thus, rather than eliminating this space to make way for buildings that do not accommodate these uses, the plans should be re-drafted to accommodate current popular community uses and wants.

In conclusion, the plan for the lots at 4th & M are a step back from current usage. We need open spaces for our families, children and pets. Thank you for our consideration of my comments.

Danielle Her Many Horses

SW Resident since 2005