



# UNITE HERE Local 25

BEFORE THE  
ZONING COMMISSION  
FOR THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

ZC Application 11-03J  
Application of Wharf Phase 3 REIT Leaseholder, LLC  
Hearing date: November 6, 2017

Testimony of UNITE HERE Local 25  
901 K Street NW, Suite 200  
Washington DC 20001

Good evening. My name is Dida El-Sourady. I am an organizer with UNITE HERE Local 25 and a Ward 4 resident. Our union is an organization of more than 7,500 hospitality workers from the D.C. metropolitan region. Our members are the hard-working individuals who scrub the tubs, change the sheets, cook the meals, and provide hospitality in the District's twenty-three union hotels. We fight every day to create middle class jobs in the hotel industry here in the District of Columbia.

We are opposed to the proposed modification of the first-stage PUD, as currently proposed. In the first phase of this project, the developer refused to make any commitment to create high-quality jobs at the Wharf. Since that time, they've refused to even meet with us or our members.

This refusal to commit to high-quality jobs is hurting our members and exacerbating inequality in the District.

When a developer like PN Hoffman builds and operates a hotel without paying fair wages or benefits, it isn't those workers alone who suffer. Our members and their families also suffer because such a project lowers working standards across the city.

We see the harmful effects of low-quality jobs every week as we talk to workers from non-union hotels. But you don't have to take our word for it.

Several recent studies have documented how the real estate boom has failed to benefit many D.C. families, especially working class and African American families. According to a report published last month by Georgetown University for the D.C. Commission on African American Affairs, the primary cause of this growing inequality is the difference in wage growth rates between high-earning and low-earning workers.

And as you have heard from our brothers and sisters in the construction industry, a recent report from the D.C. Fiscal Policy Institute makes clear that this project is itself a



major culprit. This development, with its low-quality jobs, is pushing our families out of the District.

This Planned Unit Development cannot be lawfully approved if it is found to be inconsistent with the Comprehensive Plan. And it is clearly not consistent with the letter or the spirit of the plan.

On its face, this proposal likely conflicts with Policy ED-4.2.7: Living Wage Jobs:

***Policy ED-4.2.7: Living Wage Jobs***

Promote the attraction and retention of living wage jobs that provide employment opportunities for unskilled and semi-skilled workers. Use marketing strategies and incentives to encourage the relocation of firms with such positions to the District. 717.15

There is really only one reason that any jobs like that exist at all in the District, and that is our active labor movement.

We will not be able to present surveys tonight on the exact wages, benefits, and working conditions of hotel jobs at the Wharf Phase One. What we can say, through our extensive experience, is that having a union is the only way we've seen that consistently ensures living wages in the hospitality industry.

Unfortunately, PN Hoffman has refused to provide any assurance that workers won't be harassed and threatened if they attempt to join a union. And they have failed to make any other commitment we are aware of to ensure that the hotel jobs, or any jobs, at the Wharf will conform to high standards for wages, benefits, and worker protections.

In short: the Wharf's second phase is well on track to exacerbate inequality here in the District, just as Phase I did before it.

Phase II, as conceived in the First-stage PUD, was already poised to make our District less inclusive. Now, with the proposed modification, it is worse. By shifting from office and residential to hotel and residential, the proposal only promises to create more jobs that don't pay enough for families to live in the District, and more luxury dwellings that few D.C. families can afford.

Our Comprehensive Plan is entitled "Building an Inclusive City." An inclusive project would mean that workers are paid fairly—well enough so that they can afford to live in the District. It would mean that they are respected in the workplace. Therefore, this development program is inconsistent not only with an important policy of the Economic Development element of the Comprehensive Plan, but with the very spirit and intention of the plan itself.

We are aware that the Zoning Commission does not have the power to dictate anything about labor organizing at the project. We know you cannot deny approval because the developer fails to agree to a fair process for employees to organize.

But what you can do is ensure the project complies with the Comprehensive Plan by declining to approve the proposal, unless the developer agrees to enforce job quality standards in the construction and operation of the project.

We would be happy to work with the Commission and the developer to prepare a set of employment standards that would help ensure that Phase II of this development can succeed where Phase I failed—and truly promote inclusive growth in the District of Columbia.

Thank you very much for your attention to the critical issues of equity and inclusivity in the proposal under consideration.

Sincerely,



Dida El-Sourady  
Organizing Supervisor  
UNITE HERE Local 25