

## McMillan Sand Filtration National Historic Landmark

ZC case#13-14

I have a story to share with you about the historic McMillan site, one that is rarely told. Exactly a *quarter* century ago this month, in May 1989, a huge party was held in the southwest section of McMillan. It was called '*A Picnic in the Park*.' I was one of three Bloomingdale residents that organized this community affair in order to highlight this wonderful space at our doorstep. The fences were opened and hundreds of neighborhood families from throughout the community streamed in for an afternoon of relaxation and fun. There was plenty of food and there were ice cream trucks and games for children. It was a wonderful day for McMillan and for what was hoped at the time would be a future and regular sample activity on the site.

The fight over McMillan is a David and Goliath story. I view Goliath as a VMP—a '*Very Mean Person*,' while we who are opposed to this proposed development, are like David—being very much the underdogs.

We don't have all the high priced lawyers, consultants, and sophisticated marketing strategies that VMP has. But what we do have is a vision that is very different than VMP's. And we have one powerful weapon—that is, '*common sense*.' I am hopeful that you all see the wisdom of our objections to what is proposed.

There are lots of opinions about what should happen with McMillan, but only one criterion should truly matter, and that is what is '*right*' for this site that is an incredible and unique 25-acre Historic National Landmark. That said, the VMP plan—a '*Very Misguided Plan*'—would lead to a site that is vastly overdeveloped; architecturally uninspired and with buildings far too high in elevation. Bad enough in itself, but the plan would also demolish far too many of the historic architectural and engineering artifacts.

In decades past, too many wonderful and historic buildings have been lost in our nation's capital simply for the sake of development itself, in the case of VMP, for substantial monetary profit. However, occasionally someone with common sense and an appreciation for historic preservation has stood up and helped preserve incredible sites and buildings. For example, First Lady Jackie Kennedy saved Lafayette Park from becoming office blocks. The Old Post Office Building on Pennsylvania Avenue was saved from the wrecking ball by a determined group of civic-minded citizens. Today, these historic sites have been re-purposed and are now appreciated by millions of people from all over the world. Many such battles have been waged and in the end many were won. Why? Because common sense prevailed.

The fact that McMillan is a unique National Historic site makes the zoning changes one of the most important decisions this board could ever make. There is but one opportunity to get this right. Your zoning decision can never be reversed and it will determine the ultimate nature of McMillan. People will visit this site for hundreds of years, and every day your wisdom will be judged. It is clear that this

development as proposed, specifically the office buildings which will rise over 130 feet, will overwhelm the historic structures that inhabit this site.

Yet McMillan *could* be developed while still preserving all the historic structures by using a VMP plan, a *Very Modified Plan*. Nearly half of all the ornate historic portal entrances leading to the underground cells will unnecessarily be demolished. That is clearly not acceptable for a National Historic landmark when an alternate plan is easily possible. In an historic neighborhood you are not permitted to remove a front porch or even do something as simple as change a front door without approval. These same strict standards should also apply to McMillan. Not a single above-ground historic structure should be demolished due to a zoning change. The underground cells are also amazing, and I hope you have had the opportunity and pleasure of touring these structures that are open spaces with vaulting as in a medieval cathedral.

I have a brief background story regarding the intersection of Michigan Ave. and First St. NW, which is of course central to the McMillan site. About five years ago I stood at that intersection with DDOT officials and observed the northbound traffic backup on First St. at the light on Michigan. The left-turning vehicles filled the left-turn lanes such that they blocked all the through traffic behind them causing daily jam-ups. Consequently, DDOT removed eight parking meters at street side to allow for lengthening the left-turn lane and permit easier through traffic. This also, not incidentally, allowed the numerous emergency vehicles heading toward the hospitals to better maneuver through the intersection.

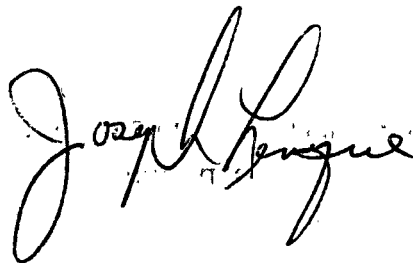
But now the proposed VMP plan, by creating new turn lanes into McMillan, will *shorten* the left-turn lane we fixed and create congestion by placing additional traffic lights in the exact same location that DDOT previously had determined created dangerous conditions. Thus, this proposed VMP—again a *'Very Misguided Proposal'*—would reverse our prior successful efforts and again prevent the ambulances from quick transport of emergency patients. This in itself presents a public safety issue which negatively impacts all District residents.

In closing, I do hope that in the future that if you have occasion to visit McMillan, you will know that your zoning decisions helped preserve a wonderful place, one that people will admire, and one that will make all district residents proud of what occupies this monumental National Landmark.

I ask you, please, do not allow overdevelopment of McMillan and preserve everything you have the power to save through *'common sense'* zoning decisions.

Thank you for your consideration,

Joseph Levesque  
111 W ST NW  
Washington, DC

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Joseph Levesque". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name being particularly prominent.