

Testimony before the **Zoning Commission** for the District of Columbia
Limited Scope Public Hearing, Thursday, March 23, 2017

By **G. Lee Aikin**, DC Statehood Green Party

This testimony will present a people oriented plan for adaptive reuse of McMillan Park in Ward 5. Although this park is in Ward 5, it should be considered a resource for the entire city. In it's recent unanimous ruling, the judges at the DC Court of Appeals vacated and remanded various portions of the VMP plan for large office buildings and destruction of almost all the 20 acres of underground space at the park.

The Court deemed the present plan unacceptable and not in keeping with the prescribed uses of the park allowed under the law. The Court specifically stated that VMP's plan did not reach a level of "Special Merit" required to permit destroying this historic park and the 25 acres of green space and 20 acres below ground.

I would further like to call to your attention the following items found at DC Municipal Regulations, Title 10 (The 2006 Comprehensive Plan of the National Capital).

709.6 Policy ED-2.3.2: Visitor Attractions

Provide new and enhanced visitor attractions and entertainment venues in the District, particularly attractions that complement the traditional museums and monuments and draw more international visitors and young adults to the city. New attractions should create a clear identity for the District as the region's major entertainment center. 709.6

709.7 Policy ED-2.3.3: Amenities Beyond the Mall

Promote the development of cultural amenities beyond the Mall in an effort to more fully capitalize on the economic benefits of tourism. 709.7

The testimony that follows: "**A Finer Vision for McMillan Park**," and "**Food – The Soul of the City**" addresses the above **Policy** concerns. In addition I believe my testimony touches on all Issues No. 1 – 5, as they are complex and interrelated.

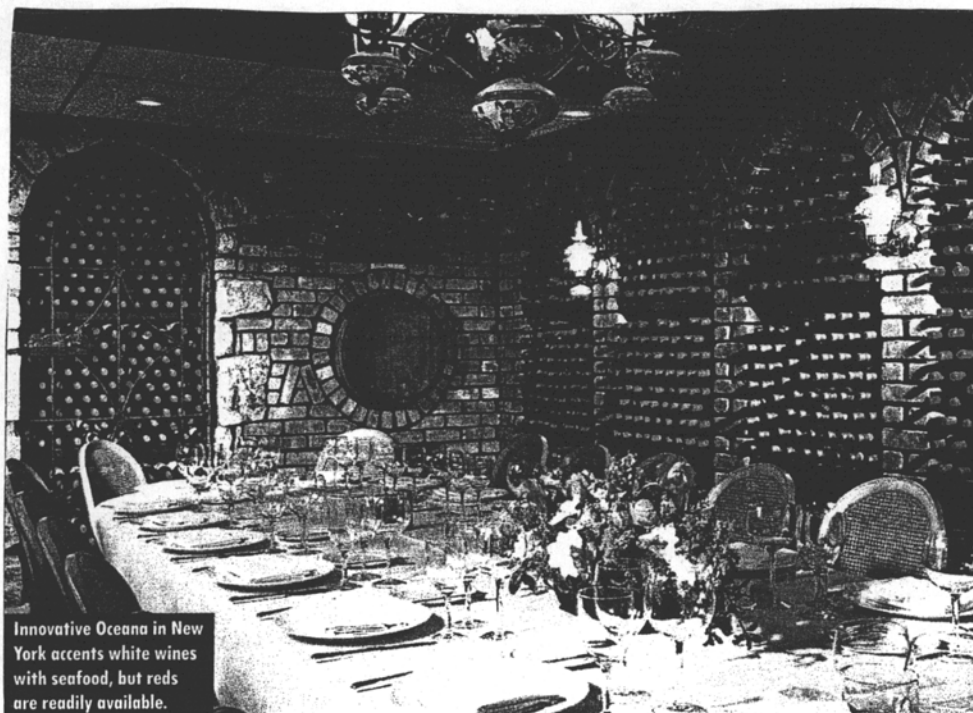
As a further concern I would like to state that allowing VMP to do a 300 item document dump last week and not allowing us time to review these items is grossly unfair and prejudicial to equal treatment under the law. This "limited scope" hearing fails to give proper attention to these complexities and seems to violate the spirit of the Court's ruling.

A FINER VISION FOR McMillan Park

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Since one strong argument against the current plan is that the intersection of North Capitol St. and Michigan Ave. is already a rush hour traffic nightmare, a better plan should focus on off peak hours. The plan suggested here responds to those concerns. Why not have Wolf Trap and Glen Echo type events here? To enhance them and provide added revenue, why not have a mix of high and lower end restaurants, wine cellars and rathskellers in the underground spaces with their 15 foot ceilings. DC already has thriving custom brewery businesses, and Virginia and Maryland can offer more and finer vintages from wineries.

Custom foods like mushrooms, culinary herbs, and other specialties could be grown underground to supply them, and ceilings painted in spectacular art can attract visitors and paying customers while providing a venue for our artists.



OCEANA, NY City - White linen, gleaming silver and delicate crystal to serve 1,000 wines. Terra-cotta tiles, wrought iron wine racks evoke dining in a French *cave*.

IN THE NATION'S MOST EXCLUSIVE WINE CELLAR DINING ROOMS?



The wine cellar in the Wine Cellar at the XV Beacon Hotel in Boston is deep in classic Bordeaux.

THE FEDERALIST RESTAURANT/XV BEACON HOTEL

Boston, MA

The brick-and-limestone Beaux Arts building that houses the XV Beacon Hotel holds a dining treat in its heart. Tucked away beneath The Federalist Restaurant is The Wine Cellar, a private dining room with rich mahogany tables and seats up to 40 guests. The handsome room, with its double-vaulted ceiling and caged glass walls, even houses some 18th century wines. The Fed's extensive wine collection includes such jewels as a bottle of 1907 Heidsieck Monopole Champagne salvaged from a schooner sunk by a German U-boat, and a 1937 Domaine Romanée-Conti. The list is deep in classic Bordeaux, boasting 22 vintages of d'Yquem, 41 vintages of Lafite, 39 vintages of Pétrus and 64 vintages of Latour.

Chef Eric Brennan keeps a rooftop herb garden and tanks full of fish—believe us, everything on the menu (from New England Clambake to Beef Wellington) is as fresh as it can be.

Cellar Facts:

- Number of seats: 40
- Number of bottles: 23,000
- Number of different wines: 1,860
- Decor: Vaulted ceiling, cobblestone floors, mahogany dining tables, low flower centerpieces, candlelight.
- Much of the rare collection is on display, including vintage Armagnacs and Cognacs.
- Expect sommelier Christian Vassilev to pop in and out as he makes selections for other diners.

The Federalist Restaurant

15 Beacon Street

Boston, MA 02108

Phone: 617/670-1500

Website: www.xvbeacon.com

This photo, which so resembles what could be build in McMillan's underground spaces, inspired this "Finer Vision". G. Lee Aikin (DCSGP), December 2016.

FOOD – THE SOUL OF THE CITY

As a natural complement to this “Finer Vision For McMillan Park” we also have the ideas developed by The McMillan Coalition for Sustainable Agriculture (MCSA). MCSA is an unincorporated non profit organization under DC law. They are not developers, but organized in 2013 to provide a competing vision to the high -density development plans then under consideration. They have actively supported a people's park of such high quality it could be a national demonstration project that would draw tourists and urban planners from across the country and the world.

Recent advances in urban green technology have created exciting potential to grow literally tons of wholesome green food along with high quality protein from fish and seafood efficiently and effectively in the thermally stable underground caverns that VMP would



destroy at McMillan Park. We see the opportunity to create an exciting combination of the esthetic and the practical in a single function space.

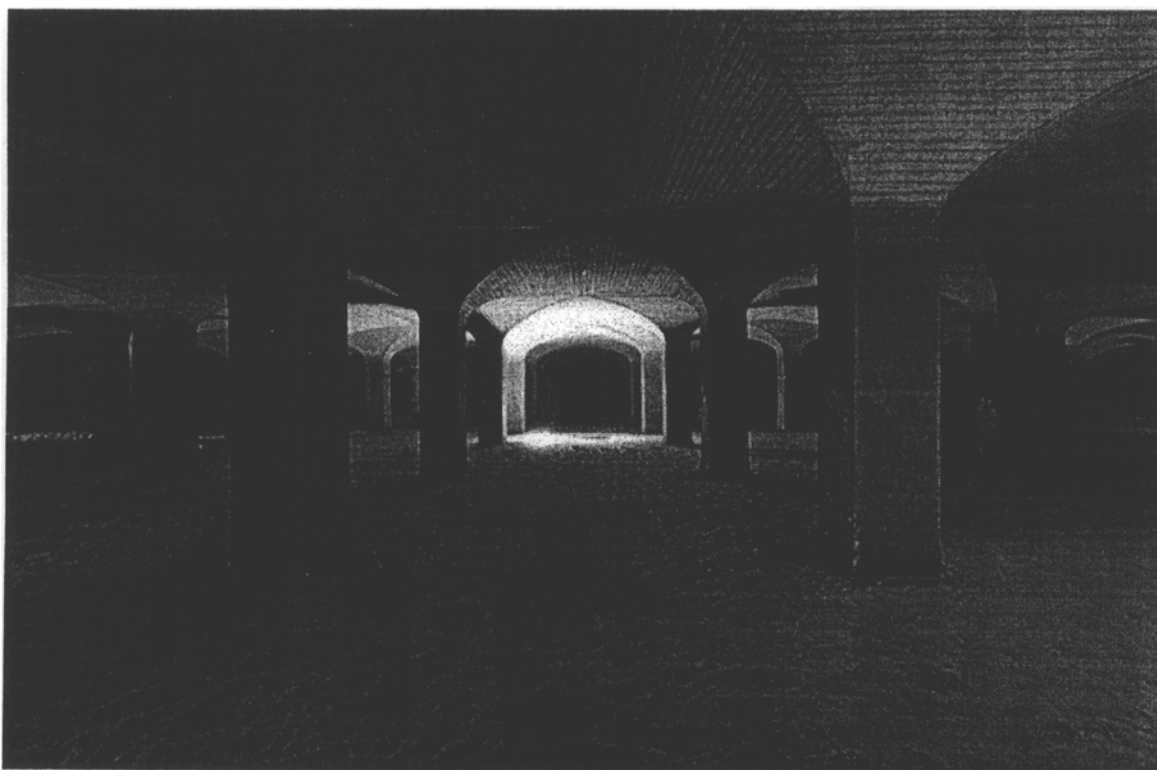
Expanding upon this food theme, the existing space is perfect for the growing trend in artisanal small boutique restaurants that are unique creating local dishes with local food. Winery's, local brewing, artisanal cheeses, and specialty crops like mushrooms all could combine

in a health promoting permanent and profitable business design. Revenue from leased space, the 10% charge for prepared food, taxes on business profits, and income taxes from DC residents employed in these activities should satisfy the DC governments desire for revenue. Foreign countries could be invited to grow, prepare and sell some of their food specialties, serving to further McMillan's interest and tourist potential.

The great Olmsted himself envisioned and designed it as a “Peoples Park,” to be open and accessible to all, and not the province of the affluent and the privileged. This should certainly include tourists who, if the current President succeeds in his major downsize of the Federal government, will be an even more important source of DC's revenue. Please understand these ideas are primarily aimed at saving the vast, almost 900,000 square foot space underground that VMP plans to destroy.

Other cities have had the vision to adaptively reuse their underground spaces. In Houston an underground reservoir 1/10th size of our space collects admission for the art they display there. Thriving Underground Atlanta is 12 acres of basements abandoned when street level were raised, now adaptively reused. London has converted an old bunker into a farm using hydroponic technology to help feed the city. Throughout the world abandoned subterranean spaces ranging from gold to salt mines have been reclaimed as theme parks, health spas for asthmatics, data centers, cathedrals and even the world's largest underground bike park. The Turda Salt Mines in Romania feature a playground, ferris wheel, mini golf course, sports arena, and other entertainments.

Surely, we in DC can be as creative with our own 20 underground acres.



List of potential uses for **20 acres** of underground space with 15+' ceilings:

- * Unique wine cellar and rathskeller type dining and wining establishments
 - * Brew pubs and possible small brewing capabilities
 - * Underground farming of specialty herbs, mushrooms, other foods for above businesses
 - * Underground fish culture
 - * Ceiling space and columns used for murals and public art (our own Sistine Chapel?)
 - * Other stores, social, and artistic spaces, as well as open area for public activities
- * **You supply your ideas:**

Above ground ideas **not envisioned** by the so-called VMP "Visionaries":

- * Wolf Trap, Glen Echo and Torpedo Factory type events and activities
 - * Community gardens, including ones for busing in seniors and people from Wards 7 & 8
 - * Solar installations to power below and above ground needs
 - * A jogging track and other small group sports spaces
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Major activities should be oriented to **non rush hour times**, avoiding the terrible gridlock VMP's plan will cause at this already difficult intersection.

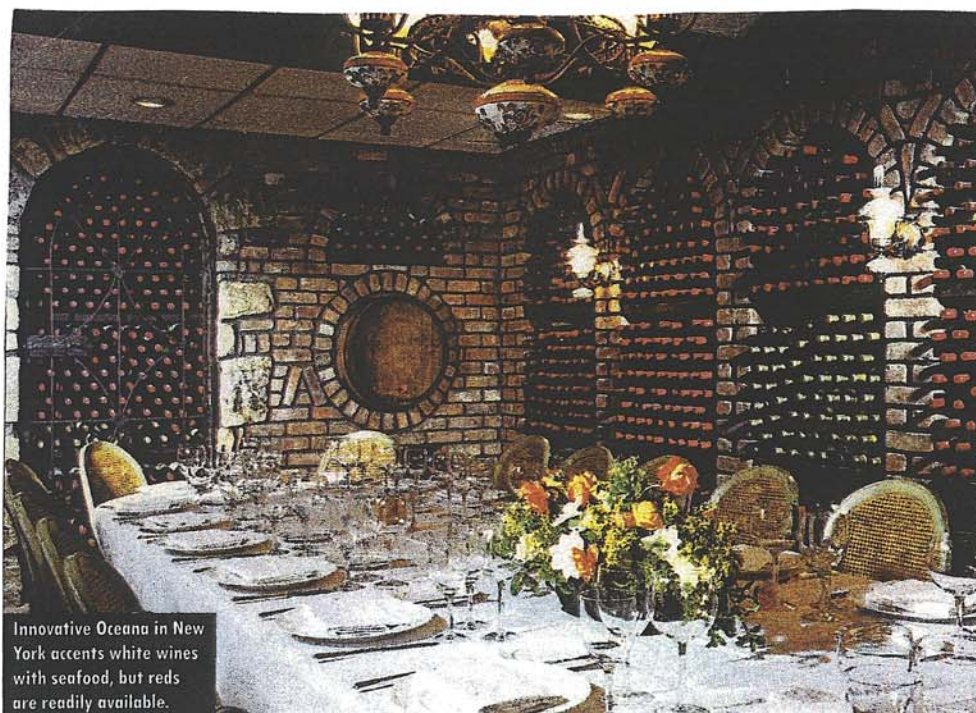
TO FIND DETAILED ARTICLES ON McMILLAN PARK See: gleeaikin.blogspot.com
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Custom foods like mushrooms, culinary herbs, and other specialties could be grown underground to supply them, and ceilings painted in spectacular art can attract visitors and paying customers while providing a venue for our artists.



Innovative Oceana in New York accents white wines with seafood, but reds are readily available.



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SEPTEMBER 2001

WINE ENTHUSIAST

M A G A Z I N E



ULTIMATE WINE CELLAR DINING

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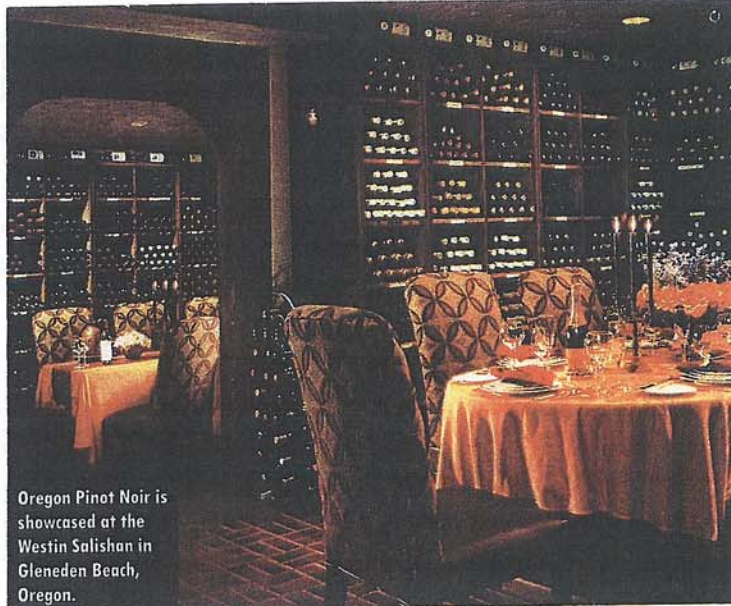
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DC must have a score of restaurateurs, custom brewery owners and others who would be excited by this concept. Now we must go out and find them, so they can add their voices to the fight to keep McMillan Park close to its original form and for uses that will be unique and attractive to visitors and residents.



Oregon Pinot Noir is showcased at the Westin Salishan in Gleneden Beach, Oregon.

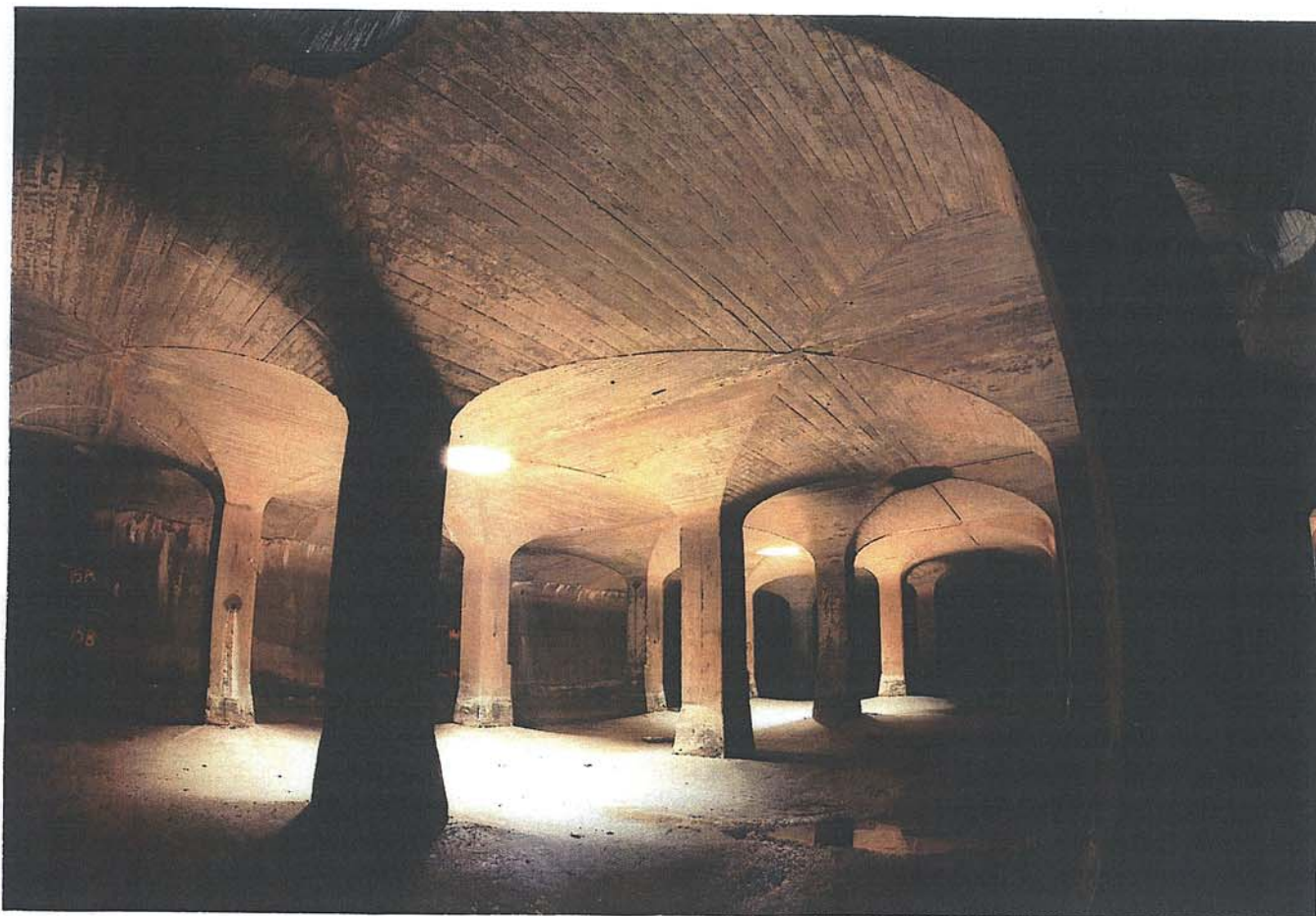
THE WESTIN SALISHAN, OR, showcases seafood, game and produce like pan-seared halibut with wild nettle pasta, foraged vegetable ragout, and grilled filet of beef with spring morels and truffle potato croquettes. Decor features subdued lighting, dark hardwood shelves and earthenware tile. Featured are custom, 5-course tasting menus designed to pair with the wine served. Over 500 wines are available, especially Oregon Pinot Noir (90+ labels).

THE SARDINE FACTORY, Monterey, California – The artifacts in this wine cellar are genuine antiques with 16th century Spanish chandeliers and candelabra and circa-1860 gold-leaf English mirrors. Used fire bricks frame the room and catacombs. Cellar master and Chef work to pair wines with cuisine featuring seafood and prime beef. A 25-foot redwood banquet table, Cognac bar and Cognac locker complete décor. 25,000 bottles including 1,300 kinds of wine complete the dream created by the happy co-owners.



There are so many bottles to be stored at Monterey's Sardine Factory, there's a second smaller wine room upstairs.

Let us contact and encourage such bold entrepreneurs to take part in creating a real vision for McMillan Park that will not resemble Tyson's Corner and its nightmare traffic and inhuman scale, a vision that very few in DC would desire.



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