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Anthony J. Hood, Chairman
District of Columbia Zoning Commission
441 4th Street, NW
Room 200S
Washington, DC 20001

Re: Testimony in Opposition to proposed McMillan Park PUD (Case #13-14)

Dear Chairman Hood and Zoning Commission Members,

There are many reasons to oppose the zoning changes requested by Vision McMillan Partners and the Office of the Deputy Mayor for Planning and Development. First among them is the disregard of the binding historic preservation covenants that conditioned the sale of the land. The proposed development plans do not even attempt to conform to the *Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation and Guidelines for Rehabilitating Historic Buildings*. The plans, rather than having "no adverse effect" on the historic site, are incompatible with the historic character of the site, and they will have considerable adverse effects not only on historic McMillan Park but also on the surrounding communities. The important character-defining features, the underground caverns, would be almost completely and unnecessarily destroyed, with little to no effort made to retain these singular historic constructions.*

Besides the irretrievable loss of historic resources, including the vistas of Washington monuments and landmarks, the size, height and scale of the development bear no relationship to the character of the site and can only be found to have an unacceptable impact on the surrounding neighborhoods.

The unacceptable impacts include significant increases in traffic congestion, overflow, delays and dangers. The site is not close to a Metro station, yet the applicant cites inclusion in their plan of "premium transit services" and "superior vehicular circulation." I have never considered shuttle buses "premium transit services." Traffic along Michigan Avenue is slowed considerably by the Monroe Street Market development, which was not considered in the traffic study. Nor was the proposed development at the Old Soldier's Home property, or the projects at Trinity and Catholic Universities, which will add considerable burdens to traffic and the environment. While on-street parking will be

eliminated in some neighboring areas, the proposed plan also includes 1732 parking spaces in place of the destroyed underground caverns and even offers to relieve parking shortage for the medical centers. One wonders about the assertion that this will be a “complementary new destination...easily accessible from all areas of the city.” The traffic issues are hardly “smart.” And they are particularly dangerous in that three hospitals are virtually co-located at the site with emergency vehicles coming and going 24/7. Clearly, the adverse traffic impacts are unsafe, unacceptable and unsuccessfully mitigated in the proposed plan.

McMillan Park is a unique place with great potential for adaptive reuse of the iconic underground and above ground structures. From the get go residents and neighbors have grasped its significance and urged city leaders to consider alternatives to the dense development that is before us. Moving ahead with the DMPED/VMP plan is a blow to small d democracy. Years of considered and committed advocacy by residents and citizens have not opened a door to honest, win/win, city/citizen communication. The plan has little to do with the preservation and repurposing of a very important industrial site and a Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr. landscape. For reasons I can only speculate, representatives of the city, through successive administrations, have clung, for their own taking, as tenaciously to this site as a dog to a bone. Somehow the notion of “public” morphed into meaning the government in the guise of its role as representative of the public. So, contentions between government officials, their private sector partners, and the public are inevitable.

If the public were really in support of the proposed plans, the developer would not have need to hire an out-of-town public relations firm with a goal to “Shift community dialogue and general perception to that of majority local support for VMP plans; Provide continuous political cover to local elected officials;” etc., and “(Re)educate residents on elements of VMP plans; Neutralize opposition; Engage and leverage the support of third-party validators...” etc. or to promote falsehoods to neighbors and particularly to elected officials.

If the public were really in support of “surplussing” this public property to give to private developers, DMPED would have recorded the June surplus meeting and issued a report of the standing room only crowd speaking thoughtfully against the giveaway of the land to private developers. A report has not been forthcoming.

We, the opposition, reached out to the erstwhile NCRC, Councilmembers and to Jair Lynch to initiate discussions for creative possibilities for repurposing historic McMillan Park. (Yes, it was a park, and it is shameful that it has been neglected since the District bought it.) The 180 or so meetings the developers claim were nothing more than community involvement theatre. At best plans were tweaked, and the ball was always in the developer’s court. Never once was real recognition given to the opportunity to create a special place in the heart of the District of Columbia, connect the Emerald Necklace of the City Beautiful design, think big and creatively, as New Yorkers did with the High Line

for instance, coordinate with mayoral initiatives for a Sustainable DC and One City, adapt this historic park and industrial site as a destination for all people in what the late “most important” Riggs Bank claimed as “the most important city in the most important country in the world.”

We neighbors and Friends of McMillan have never said “no;” we have consistently urged “yes” to creative repurposing of the tremendous public asset that McMillan Park is. City leaders have consistently said “no” to any ideas other than their own concepts of “development,” even as development and gentrification have pushed farther east and south. The result is a development plan (the District’s “most controversial and divisive project” [WBJ 11.26.13]) that is unacceptable by many measures of Section 2403 PUD evaluation standards.

Everyone is tired of the park being fenced off, of the status quo, of the bickering and pitting of neighbor against neighbor. The great shame is that preservation and truly great adaptation was never really on the table. I hope, with many others, that the Zoning Commission will defer the applicant’s request and reconsider the potential for uses of special value. The proposed “public benefits” are neither superior in quality or quantity. They are truly unacceptable.

Respectfully,

Jane F. Huntington

*You might look at the You Tube video showing DC Water Engineer and Project Manager Kevin Williams as he demonstrates The McMillan Project to store storm water: “It’s fascinating as an engineer to go in and see the results of the construction that was done over 100 years ago. These things were built in the late 1800’s early 1900’s and to see the condition that they’re in now--those fellows back in the day knew what they were doing.”

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KeN9xe4Wo4Q&feature=share&list=UU3vlgap-mWgptYeW-gnIDPw>

cc: Mayor Vincent Gray
Deputy Mayor Victor Hoskins
Members of the DC Council