

Statement of

JOHN T. SALATTI

On behalf of

THE FRIENDS OF McMILLAN PARK

On Z.C. Case No 13-14

First Stage and Consolidated PUD and Related Map Amendment @ 2501 First St. NW

Square 3128, Lot 800, the McMillan Reservoir Sand Filtration site

May 13, 2014

### **DO WE HONESTLY BELIEVE?**

Thank you Mr Chairman and thank you members of the Commission for this opportunity to offer some thoughts about the case before you. My name is John Salatti, a 10-year Bloomingdale resident and someone who has lived in D C. several other times over the past 30 years. I have spent the past eight years serving my neighbors in various capacities including ANC commissioner, Bloomingdale Civic Association officer and member, and just plain guy on the street. I am a Friend of McMillan Park. I've been engaged with this latest attempt to develop the McMillan Sand Filtration Site since 2006 when the National Capital Revitalization Corporation sent out the first of what was supposed to be several RFPs I have personally given tours of McMillan to groups as small as one and as large as hundreds. I know this site I know its history. I know this community. I know that everyone I have ever spoken with wants some development to occur at McMillan (even the most radical elements in the area, some of whom have come before you, want the site developed). I also know that the vast majority of residents don't want what is before you, most especially when they truly understand both the proposed plan's details and its implications So I ask you to reject the Application's zoning request; the opponents have given you ample bases for doing just that

Having said that, what else can I really offer at this point? Well, having read documentation and attended meetings for the last eight years, I've compiled a list of what I call the "honestly believes." An honestly believe goes to the question of credulity or credibility. It generally comes about when average persons express their reaction to some aspect of the proposed plan Here are a few honestly believes that I have gathered over the years.

Regarding the **Scale** of the proposed project, the regulations and policies all say the same basic thing: moderate density commercial; moderate- to medium-density housing, retail, and other uses.<sup>1</sup> When approving Comprehensive Plan changes to allow development at McMillan, the National Capitol Planning Commission went so far as to define ***moderate density***: "From this

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<sup>1</sup> Comp Plan Policy MC 2.6.5 Scale and new uses

"Where development takes place [at McMillan], it should consist of moderate- to medium-density housing, retail, and other compatible uses "

analysis we find that any structures to be introduced with the District-owned part of McMillan Park should be widely spaced, **not to exceed the 4-story height of the Veterans Hospital**, and preferably have lower transitional heights and picturesque rooflines to blend with the immediate landscape and the park environs.” Does anyone *honestly believe* that the proposed plan meets or even comes close to that?

Part of what makes McMillan a very special place is the **Viewsheds**. Again the Comp Plan McMillan amendments state that “[a]ny development on the site should maintain viewsheds and vistas.”<sup>2</sup> Does anyone *honestly believe* that the proposed plan meets or even comes close to that?

When the viewsheds are combined with the vast **Open Space** that is historic McMillan, we have a place that in Washington is truly unique and magical. NCPC declared “that a distinctly open-space character of McMillan Park is still scenically desirable as a Federal interest.”<sup>3</sup> Does anyone *honestly believe* that the proposed plan upholds or protects that Federal interest?

Some of the best “honestly believes” have arisen around **Historic Preservation**. According to the Comprehensive Plan, “**Any development on the site should . . . be situated in a way that minimizes impacts on historic resources and adjacent development.**”<sup>4</sup> According to VMP’s own “Historic Preservation Report for the Proposed Redevelopment of the McMillan Slow Sand Filtration Plant,”<sup>5</sup> McMillan is historically significant. According to covenants that run with the land, any and all rehabilitation and renovation work at the parcel will be undertaken in accordance with the *Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation and Guidelines for Rehabilitating Historic Buildings*. Specifically, “New additions, exterior alterations, or related new construction will not destroy historic materials, features, and spatial relationships that characterize the property.”

Apparently, VMP is taking the perhaps ironic view that because the plan calls for destroying 80% of the historic fabric of this place on the National Register of Historic Places and DC List of Historic Sites, they need not follow the covenant’s rehabilitation and renovation requirements. The argument apparently being that with nothing left to rehabilitate or renovate, the covenant is rendered moot. This cramped reading results in a sort of Vietnam-era destroy-the-village-in-order-save-it approach to development or certainly to side-stepping the law. But however VMP wants to define things, does anyone *honestly believe* that the proposed plan comports with these legally binding covenants?

As for **Traffic**, McMillan Policy 2.6.3 of the Comprehensive Plan requires any plan for the site to reduce parking, traffic, and noise impacts on the community and improve transportation options to the site *and* the surrounding neighborhood. Well, given that the VMP traffic plan says nothing about the impact of the traffic on the neighborhoods beyond the boundaries of the Site, offers little to nothing in the way of significant mitigation, does not take into account the cumulative synergies of numerous large developments in the area, and admits (when deconstructed) to over new 22,000 vehicle trips through our neighborhoods every day, given all that, does anyone *honestly believe* that the proposed plan meets or even comes close to Comp Plan Policy 2.6.3 requirement to *reduce traffic impacts on the community and improve transportation options for the surrounding neighborhoods*?

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<sup>2</sup> *Id*

<sup>3</sup> National Capital Planning Commission, NCPC File No. CP19, February 12, 1990

<sup>4</sup> Comp. Plan Policy MC 2.6.5

<sup>5</sup> EHT Traceries, Inc. for Vision McMillan Partners, July 28, 2010

As for **Jobs**, the Application makes questionable and unsupported employment claims. The largest subset of jobs is temporary construction jobs in a city that has a long history of not enforcing its first source laws. The plan includes a vague category of “indirect jobs.” The Applicant does not explain what these jobs are, where they will come from, or who will hold them. Finally, the Applicant continually trumpets that the permanent jobs will reduce unemployment in Ward 5. Yet, the Applicant has no process to ensure that Ward or District residents will get those alleged jobs. And if the current scenario at Washington Hospital Center is any guide, most of those jobs will go to Maryland residents who will be among the 22,000 new trips to our area each day. All of which leads to the question, does anyone *honestly believe* that the proposed plan’s employment claims are credible or will help the neighborhood or Ward 5?

Regarding **Affordable Housing**, well the problem is that the plan doesn’t have much of it and worse, what little it has is not particularly affordable. So McMillan is being set up to become another EYA project where residences start “from the low \$600s.” What the proposed plan does is now make the District of Columbia government the primary agent of gentrification in our area. Simply by market forces alone, we have seen the loss of affordable housing in Bloomingdale over the past 15 years; the proposed plan now will be government policy that will turn that stream into torrent as the high-priced housing in the plan drives out what little affordable housing still exists in Bloomingdale. Does anyone *honestly believe* that a plan that offers so little affordable housing, that drives out existing lower cost housing, and that trumpets housing accessible to people at 80% AMI has any realistic relationship with the needs of long-time Washingtonians and their children who wish to stay in the city that their families have lived in for generations?

Those, commissioners, are a few of the *honestly believes* that I have collected. But there’s one more I have to share. This one comes from the people whom I have taken around McMillan on tours. During those walks, I explained the history of McMillan and described the VMP plans for the Site. I never said anything disparaging. I never had to; the plan did all the talking for me. At the end of the tour, after seeing McMillan up close and learning about the proposed plan, I usually had at least a few people who looked kind of puzzled. They would turn to me and say, “Do they *honestly believe* we would want that? Do they *honestly believe* that that’s the best we can do here?” I would just smile and say nothing.

But tonight I am here to say something. I honestly believe that you, the Commission, can do something. Instead of letting the District turn this extraordinary place into something painfully ordinary, you can reject this zoning application and, in so doing, tell the District and its development partners that the time has come to stop treating McMillan Park<sup>6</sup> like some brownfield or Superfund site. We can do better than this, a lot better. The neighborhood residents deserve better and the city as a whole deserves better. Because we the people own this land, we have the rare opportunity to create something great, something that will be remembered for generations to come. That’s what McMillan can be. Honestly.

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<sup>6</sup> Although VMP has vehemently denied that the Site was ever a park and has spread that particularly pernicious and self-serving misinformation at every opportunity, the facts have shown again and again from its conception with the Olmsted Walk through the first World War when news articles report that the Site (as clearly described in the article) was used for community gardens to other articles reporting concerts and other events on going there to senior citizens still with us today telling us about their youthful experiences at the Sand Filtration Site to younger folks (in their 50s and 60s) telling us that they would sneak on to the Site and play there long after it was fenced off. It was a park and could be a great park again, among other things.