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Washington, DC 20001

Malcolm M. Kenton
Testimony Before the DC Zoning Commission
May 13, 2014

I grew up in North Carolina, but I've been living at the southern end of Bloomingdale for almost five years. I am a lifelong environmentalist. I cherish parks and natural areas and open space, and strongly believe in incorporating these into the fabric of our city. I also believe in historic preservation, and I recognize the unique historical qualities of the McMillan Sand Filtration Site.

Because of my commitment to sustainability, I am also an advocate of smart growth. From the perspective of our rapidly-growing region, smart growth means accommodating as many new residents as possible close to the core of the city, where they can get to job and retail centers conveniently without having to drive. Building cities and towns more compactly not only conserves energy and preserves rural land, it also conserves public resources by allowing existing investments in infrastructure to serve a larger number of residents, while creating walkable places with the kind of character that makes them fun places to live. More of those who are moving to our region anyway, including those with low and moderate incomes, should have the opportunity to live in a vibrant neighborhood with shops, restaurants, and cultural amenities within walking distance.

Also, as a Bloomingdale resident, I see the need for more close-by retail options, including a grocery store. A recreation center^{and}, community center would also be tremendous assets to the neighborhood. It is for all these reasons that I support the planned revival of the McMillan site as a mixed-use community of residences (including, importantly, a high percentage of affordable units), offices and retail alongside an expansive park, rec center and community center, that incorporates and interprets the site's historic features.

I have heard opponents of the planned redevelopment argue that the site was originally a grand, Olmstead Jr.-designed park that should be preserved as such. But it was never primarily a park--it was a working public utilities site where contaminants were filtered from the city's drinking water supply. It exemplified a pioneering concept in public works, and for this, some part of it should be preserved and interpreted as a museum.

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The Vision McMillan Partners plan does exactly this, making this treasure truly a part of our community rather than a decrepit, fenced-off relic. The plan would actually create a "McMillan Park" that never really existed before.

Turning the entire site into a public open space would require a major investment of public funds simply to stabilize the site so that it would be safe for the public to occupy it. Instead, with this plan, the District is getting a big new park, plus many other amenities, for much less money in a fine example of a public-private partnership.

However, I and many of my fellow neighbors are legitimately concerned that the lack of high-capacity, frequent transit service to the site will mean worsened traffic congestion in surrounding neighborhoods. That is why I will join others in pressuring the District and/or WMATA to invest in increasing bus frequencies on the 80 and H-series routes, along with adding a frequent shuttle service that would connect the McMillan site and Washington Hospital Center with Metrorail's Red Line. I also support a streetcar along Michigan Avenue, though that will take longer to plan and build. Just because current transit service is inadequate to meet future demand stemming from development doesn't mean this can't change, and that more can't be done to encourage people to get to the new neighborhood by means other than driving.

The community design process undertaken by the development team in collaboration with District government agencies has made the revised plan even better than the original. The McMillan Site has benefitted the city for generations by providing clean, drinkable water to residents. Now it's time to let it continue to improve residents' lives in new ways. It should be enlivened as part of the city's fabric that weaves its history in with contemporary uses.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Malcolm M. Kenton", followed by a horizontal line extending to the right.