

Zoning Testimony by Yasmina Mrabet for ONE DC Case No. 14-18A

My name is Yasmina Mrabet and I am an organizer with ONE DC. I've been working closely with the Residents Association and tenants at Brookland Manor, many of whom are ONE DC members. I am here to attest to what I have witnessed on the property, including the extreme stress and trauma that Mid-City has been causing many families, people with disabilities, and seniors.

Regarding families, Mid-City has openly and brazenly used tactics to break families up in order to move them into smaller units. At the last zoning hearing, transcripts show that Mr. Caruso, in his testimony for Mid-City, stated, and I quote, "in a couple of the cases of the four-bedroom units we have multi-generational families where we can break the family up and give them two units...Where you would have one generation in one apartment home and a second generation in a second apartment home. That's one way of handling the large family issue." Many families at Brookland Manor have already been broken up in exactly the way Mr. Caruso described. Not only that, but I have spoken with multiple tenants who are living in overcrowded one bedroom units. Mothers with three, four, five, and even six children in one bedroom units. Mid-City, in its own marketing literature, has stated that it does not meet occupancy standards because many residents are in the wrong-sized units. However, Mid-City continues to board up buildings that could be housing these residents that are crowded into small units. If Mid-City in its current development doesn't meet occupancy standards, what should we expect with a redevelopment plan that aims to significantly reconfigure bedroom sizes such that families are left out in the cold?

Mid-City has continually sent out misleading information as recently as this week, to both tenants and the public, falsely claiming that there are only 13 families on the property in need of four bedroom units. I know for a fact that this is false, because I personally have been inside at least two dozen units in which families are living. At the exact same time that they make the false claim that only 13 families need four bedrooms, Mid-City claims that dozens of four-bedroom "1940s vintage units" will remain on site until 2023. So are we to understand that Mid-City only cares about accommodating families for the next 7 years?

Mid-City claims to care about families, however, they have no problem barring tenant family members from the property at random, and preventing evicted family members from visiting their children who still live on the property. They have no problem keeping armed guards at the property that tell parents their kids aren't allowed to play on the grass and that they should go play on Brentwood road where they could get hit and killed by cars at a busy intersection. Mid-City has no problem with a locked iron gate on the property that keeps children off of the playground on the weekends. Mid-City has no problem with security harassing mothers for waiting for their children at bus stops. Mid-City has no problem with tenants and their children not being allowed to stand on the grass or on sidewalks or just outside their buildings. Many tenants that I've spoken with don't even go outside for fear of being targeted with harassment and "notices of infraction," and ultimately they live in fear of being singled out as being "not in good standing" and therefore unable to stay on the property after redevelopment. People are stressed, overwhelmed, anxious, confused, and Mid-City continues to engage in the most underhanded trickery.

Just yesterday, leading up to this hearing I received calls and texts from tenants who informed me that they were repeatedly called and instructed by property management to write statements in support of the redevelopment. You can read for yourselves the submissions on the zoning website and see that the tenants who did write statements wrote things like "I hope I can stay in my unit for the redevelopment." Mid-City's duplicitous and unprincipled behavior – using property management to demand statements from tenants, and then submitting those statements as evidence of support for a project that could push out the very tenants who wrote them, speaks volumes about their lack of regard and respect for tenants on their property. This is what Mid-City calls "caring about families." The bottom line is, if Mid-City cared about families, they would not propose to eliminate family sized units in a community where they have existed for 50 years. They would not propose to break up intergenerational families. They would not propose to cut down affordable housing for working class people. Mid-City's unwillingness to accommodate the needs of families shows clearly that they do not want families on the property in the new redevelopment.

Regarding tenants with disabilities, Mid-City has erected fences all over the property, causing residents with disabilities to have to travel long distances around the property to reach their cars and to get to the community room. There

are locked iron gates all around the property that prevent tenants, especially those with disabilities from easily accessing the community rooms for tenants association meetings.

Regarding seniors, many seniors live with their families, many seniors take care of grandchildren, and many seniors have expressed to that they do not want a seniors only building, as is Mid-City's plan in the redevelopment. Many seniors need their families and their families need them. They do not want to be segregated from their community. One interesting thing to note is that there were a little over 140 seniors on the property as of the last zoning hearing, yet Mid-City proposes building 200 senior-only units. Who are they building for? Brookland Manor tenants want comfortable family-sized units, and they want them to be affordable. We are fighting for the preservation of affordable housing at Brookland Manor, not only for tenants who are there now, but for those displaced who want to return, and for others around the city who are unable to access affordable housing.

Mid-City, on multiple occasions, has interfered with the tenants right to organize. Their attorney and ONE DC organizers have been harassed and threatened with arrest by armed security officers on the property. I personally have been questioned by security while canvassing the property, and I have also been blocked by Mid-City from attending meetings with tenants who asked me to be present with them on two separate occasions. Most recently, at a meeting with tenants and Michael Meers, which we agreed to in hopes of discussing how we could work with Mid-City, I was told by none other than Michael Meers that I had to leave the meeting because ONE DC is a named plaintiff in a family status discrimination lawsuit against Mid-City. When tenants informed him that they are members of ONE DC, he began stuttering and gave no real response. Tenants wanted me there, however because they were told by Michael Meers that he would not meet with them if I was in the room. Mid-City has refused to sit down with tenants and their legal and organizing teams to discuss the redevelopment in good faith.

Now I'd like to go through a few major pieces of misinformation that Mid-City has sent out to the public about the nature of their activity and future plans at Brookland Manor. The first bold lie that they have told publicly is that nobody is being displaced. I would ask the zoning commission to review the letter that the Neighborhood Legal Services Program wrote to Ward 5 Council member

Kenyan McDuffie, which details the eviction campaign that Mid-City ran at Brookland Manor, including shocking cases of tenants being evicted for being unable to pay \$25 in rent.

Mid-City claims that they met with residents and housing advocates and adjusted their redevelopment plan based on input. Interesting that they say this, considering that they have refused to even meet with tenants when advocates are in the same room! Interesting that they say this, when their plans do not meet or respond to the needs of the vast majority of tenants and families on the property. Mid-City, in their marketing literature, brags about spending over \$200,000 per year on social service programming at Brookland Manor. Is this supposed to make up for the fact that their plans for the property will put families into the streets?

Despite tenant experiences of aggression, disregard and disrespect from Mid-City Financial and the enforcers of their jail-like lockdown of the property, tenants are still willing to work with Mid-City to reach a shared and signed development agreement that would preserve 535 units of affordable housing at the same bedroom sizes and subsidy levels. With Mid-City tripling density on this property, the city should actually be demanding an INCREASE in affordable housing, but here we are fighting to keep what little affordable housing we have in this city.

I'll end with this: Mid-City claims they have a 50 year record of providing socially supportive affordable housing to thousands of low-income families. My question to Mid-City is, why break this record? Why not preserve affordable housing? My question to the zoning commission is, why approve plans to further eliminate affordable housing in the midst of an affordable housing crisis?