

# HEARING ON THE PROPOSED DC UNITED SOCCER STADIUM AT BUZZARD POINT

TESTIMONY OF MARY C. WILLIAMS,

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IN THE SOUTHWEST WATERFRONT NEIGHBORHOOD

Good Evening, Mr. Chairman, Board commissioners, DC United developers, ANC 6D colleagues, and all interested parties. My name is Mary C. Williams. I am a long-time resident and property owner in the Southwest Waterfront Neighborhood, having moved here from South Florida to work as an election protection and civil rights lawyer.

When I purchased my corner rowhouse in 2000, it wasn't because it was located in an entertainment district or near fancy restaurants or gleaming high-rise luxury apartments. There was no Nationals ballpark, and a soccer stadium wasn't even on the horizon.

For the most part, the neighborhood offered little to attract a former Floridian used to the tropical flowers and trees. Still, my neighborhood had a small-town environment and a bunch of good people, which made dealing with the rats and litter, the smell of Chinese take-outs, and 5 liquor stores within a 2-block radius, much easier to address.

A group of my neighbors who also saw potential for growth in this area set about to sprucing up our environment. We started picking up the trash, planting flowers, and a vegetable garden. We even applied and won a \$3500 grant to erect a Welcome to our Neighborhood sign and planted flowers and trees on a vacant lot at the corner of M and South Capitol Street. That was in 2003. Only two crepe myrtle trees remain; the Welcome to Southwest Waterfront destroyed by vandals nearly 5 years later.

Since 2008, however, the progress we made in transforming our ramshackled neighborhood into a community has been overshadowed and overwhelmed by this city's insatiable and relentless pursuit to turn our neighborhood into an "Entertainment District."

I'm here to remind this Board and all those who see our neighborhood as a Sports and Entertainment destination that this is our home. The narrow alleys and streets are where we travel to and from work, and it is where we gather to talk, and where we welcome guests and family to our homes on holidays and weekends. I am here tonight to remind this Board and all of those who see development and tax dollars and profits that you cannot just build over our

lives in pursuit of so-called progress. There can be no progress without residents. The District of Columbia must put the needs of its residents before tax collections and greed. The government is not supposed to be a money-making industry. It is not for sale; and it shouldn't be for profit.

I have attended only a handful of meetings regarding the Soccer stadium. However, I have attended countless meetings since 2000 regarding the South Capitol Overlay Zoning Plan, and then every meeting on the Nationals ballpark in 2005 thru 2007. My neighbors and I have had our worse fears realized.

Prior to the destruction of the 5 liquor stores, I was constantly having to run public drinkers from outside my fence where they would feel comfortable urinating after hours-long happy hour. These were mostly regulars from the neighborhood. For the past few years, I now have a steady stream of drunks and drug users doing the same thing on almost every game day.

My corner home also has become the new Taxi dropoff and Uber spot. Hundreds gather outside my home to try and avoid the traffic along South Capitol. On every game day, I cannot drive out of my neighborhood for fear that I will not be able to return until the game is over.

During the planning stages of the ballpark, my neighborhood was promised strict enforcement. The city even put up a DO NOT ENTER during Stadium Events sign at the beginning of our narrow residential block. But with no police officer at this corner to enforce this sign, and no way to enforce it anyway, it is just another symbol of how ineffective this city is in holding businesses accountable.

I apologize for having to give you some history. In summary, the parking and transportation plan for the Nationals ballpark and its 87-game schedule don't work. There is little or no parking for fans, and rather than trying to keep them out of our residential neighborhood, I see the DDOT safety and traffic folks directing them into our area. My neighbors and I are on full-time duty trying to police our neighborhood. We cannot.

So, if the Nationals transportation plan has failed, then DC United and this city cannot piggy-back onto this catastrophe in the making. Our sidewalks are too narrow to accommodate the 19,000 fans who will be trying walking from the Navy Yard Metro to Buzzard Point. I did the walk from the Metro. At a brisk pace, it took me 18 minutes to get to Potomac Avenue going along South Capitol Street, and there were no crowds. It was 7 a.m. and no one but a couple of joggers and dog-walkers were present.

If as estimated, thousands will attempt this trek from the Metro to the soccer stadium, the pedestrians will be walking in the middle of the streets in our neighborhood. The sidewalks cannot accommodate them. That will mean that any cars and bikes will not have a clear path and will likely be blocked by the throngs of people trying desperately to get to the game.

It is essential that someone – be it the city or the private developers -- bite the greedy bullet and build parking somewhere close to this stadium, preferably on the south side of the

bridge or south of M St. SW. Otherwise, to ignore this problem is to set up this project to fail before it opens.

Be good neighbors. If you invite people into your home or your sports venue, please find a way to accommodate them. These are not my guests. These are yours. Take care of them.

My neighbors and I are willing to overlook some things. But the lack of a clearly viable transportation plan and sufficient parking just does not make economic sense. Address the elephant in the room before you tackle the ant.

Thank you for listening.

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