

Testimony of Steve Seuser
Zoning Commission Case 16-11 Bruce Monroe
December 5, 2016

My name is Steve Seuser, and I have lived in Ward 1 since 1986. I am testifying today in opposition to the proposed project, for three primary reasons that I will highlight in my oral testimony, and for other reasons that I will include in my written comments.

Contrary to Green Space Guidelines in Comprehensive Plan

The proposed project runs directly counter to the area's Comprehensive Plan guidelines for green space in the area. The DC Comprehensive Plan notes the severe shortage of parks and open space and states "The dearth of parks in the Mid-City area is a serious problem that must be addressed as its population grows – all recreation areas must be retained, and new recreation areas must be provided wherever possible." Ward 1 is the most dense ward of the District, and Columbia Heights is the most densely built part of Ward 1.

Bruce Monroe Park is located in the center of the most densely built neighborhood of the city in an area with no other existing neighborhood parks within a half mile. The New Communities documentation for the proposed project at Bruce Monroe falsely claims that many other parks and recreation areas exist in the vicinity. The other facilities identified on the map are not neighborhood parks. For example, Wangari Gardens is shown as a community garden, and is located on a temporary basis on land at Irving and Park streets near Washington Hospital Center. There is no reason to believe the city will not reconfigure the intersection to remove the garden and create opportunities for additional development at the site. West of Bruce Monroe, Harriet Tubman is indicated on the map. It hosts soccer fields but is also not a park. The city even goes to far as to designate Howard University's campus as a park on their guide to parks in the area. Other co-called parks include Banneker Recreation Center to the south and Park View Recreation Center to the north. Both do not include neighborhood park space, and both are located far enough from Bruce Monroe that families with young children, neighborhood youth, and neighborhood schools and daycare centers cannot and will not use them.

Bruce Monroe Park includes features used by the entire community that cannot be included if sixty percent of the park is used for development. Specifically, the park includes two basketball courts, a tennis court, a newly installed pavilion with shaded outdoor seating, two playground areas, a community garden with raised beds for over 100 gardeners and shared plots for the entire neighborhood, all producing fresh, healthy, organic food, an extensive composting system for neighbors and the garden, an edible forest garden with fruit and nut trees and bushes, a water retention site preventing rainfall at the entire park from further burdening the city sewer system, a parking lot, and significant open space where neighbors can run, play, and explore nature. The park is used by families and individuals living blocks around the park. There is no suitable

alternative neighborhood park, and the much smaller proposed space cannot possibly provide the same quality of neighborhood park and gathering space for everyone in the neighborhood. Allowing the proposed project to proceed will affect current and future generations of children and youth, leaving them with less public space to gather and engage in positive activities.

Building Heights and Density Far Exceed Existing Built Environment and Limits

The requested increase and building density are being requested due in part based on the Georgia Avenue Overlay and the supposed bonus that should be offered to a mixed-income development. But the buildings' vast street frontage is along Irving Street, a residential street of two-story historic townhouses, none of them more than 35' in height. The larger proposed building is nine stories and 120' in total height. Allowing a building of this height dramatically overwhelms the existing structures in the neighborhood, including those directly across Irving Street to the north and adjacent to the new building on the south side of Irving Street. Buildings would shadow the entire eastern end of the block, potentially blocking installation of solar panels on many buildings. Buildings would also create a height and density precedent for the entire southern Georgia Avenue corridor. Public projects should never be in the position of imposing new height and density levels on a neighborhood as this project does.

Parking Must Be Provided Exclusively Onsite

The 273 units proposed in the two Park Morton buildings must offer all residents parking onsite. The surrounding neighborhood has already reached its capacity for street parking, since many other developments have already been built, single-family homes are being rebuilt and expanded to include multiple units, and some homes have no rear alleys and therefore no off-street parking. In addition, the Dept. of Transportation's proposed new transportation plan places additional strains on the neighborhood street parking by adding dedicated bus lanes on Irving Street and another westbound street, plus bike lanes that would eliminate one additional street's parking on one side. Irving Street already serves as an important ambulance route to the Medstar Hospital and other hospitals in that complex east of Bruce Monroe, so additional parking and even traffic is potentially threatening to the access for emergency health services. The neighborhood cannot accommodate any additional street parking. I request that no additional residential parking permits be granted to the residents of the new buildings on Bruce Monroe.

Thank you for considering these issues.

Ward 1 Park Space Facts

Severe Shortage of Ward 1 Parks & Open Green Space

- The [DC Comprehensive Plan](#) notes the severe shortage of parks & open space & states the following:

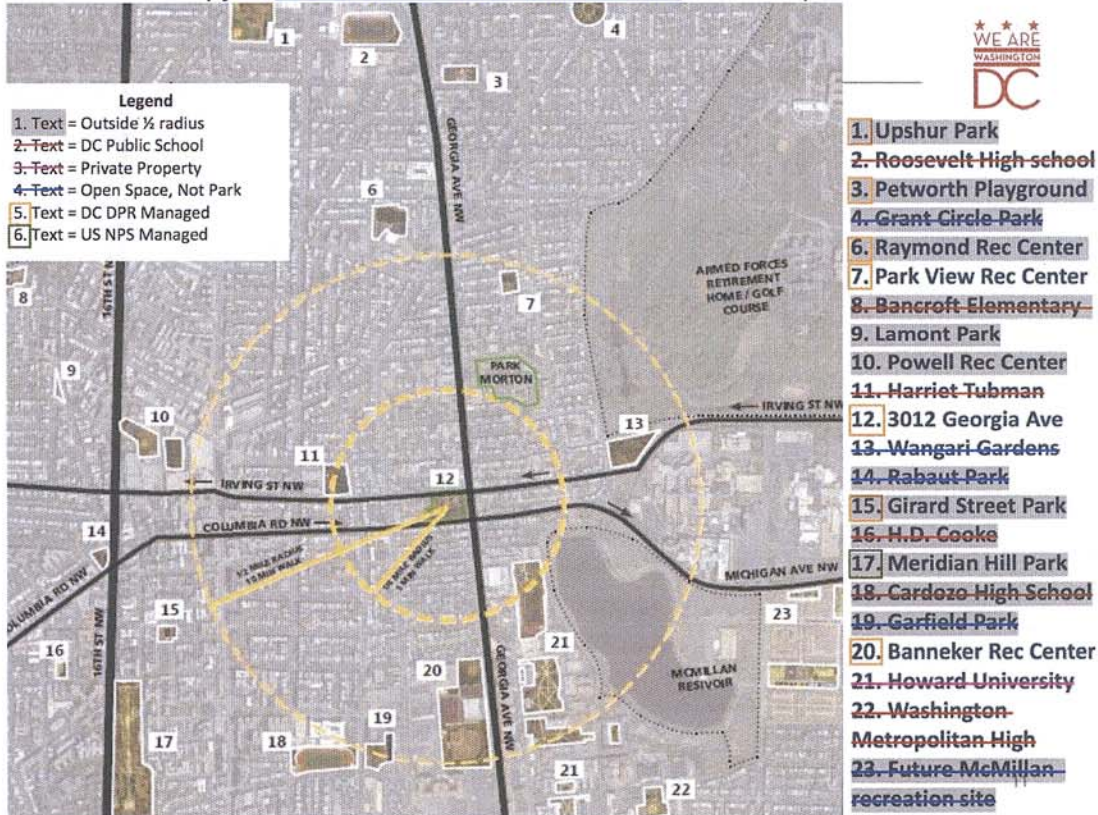
“The dearth of parks in the Mid-City area is a serious problem that must be addressed as its population grows—all recreation areas must be retained and new recreation areas must be provided wherever possible. 2009.4”

Bruce Monroe Community Park is the only public facility within a 1/2 mile radius that offers unrestricted access to 2 basketball courts, a tennis court, dog run, community garden, playground, open green space & a recently constructed shade pavilion. It is a safe space that offers something for everyone & a place for the community to come together. It is the heart of our neighborhood & an oasis from rapidly increasing density.

- Other DC DPR managed facilities are Recreation Centers, & do not feature any green or open space.
- Wangari Gardens is not a DC DPR recognized Community Garden & will be eliminated by DDOT [Crosstown Study Recommended Projects MM.5 & MM.6](#), which will modify intersections & reconfigure the street grid by eliminating the existing streets & ramps that allow higher-speed vehicular movements.



This is an annotated copy of [New Communities Initiative slide](#) that was presented to ANC 1A and 1B:



The only DC Department of Parks & Recreation managed facilities in the vicinity are Recreation Centers. The Park View Recreation center doesn't have real grass and consists entirely of paved and impermeable surfaces. The only grass at Banneker Recreation Center is part of the Maury Willis baseball diamond.