

Testimony of Dupont East Civic Action Association,

At the Office of Planning Oversight Hearing

March 18, 2021

Good afternoon, Chair Phil Mendelson. My name is Nick DelleDonne and I represent the Dupont East Civic Action Association (DECAA). DECAA has partnered with Empower DC in its opposition to the Mayor's proposed changes to the Comp Plan.

I want to relate a disturbing incident DECAA had with the Historic Preservation Office which is part of the Office of Planning. As DECAA was established to promote the historical character of our neighborhood, we applied for an extension of the historic landmark site at the Masonic Temple at 16th and S Streets NW, to stop a proposed Luxury Project, an oversized, inappropriate apartment development in our historic district.

The Historic Preservation Office (HPO) issued a report on April 30, 2019, in which significantly it identified the long-established boundary of the Landmark at 100' east of the Temple wall. This meant that the proposed Luxury Project would be on top of the historic landmark site, and effectively kill the project.

Immediately HPO was advised that it could not proceed with the Project, for this reason, and only a few days later, HPO issued a second report (contradicting the first), asserting that the boundary was not 100' out, it was at the Temple wall, making the Project possible.

How did HPO come to issue an unprecedented second contradictory report in just a few days of one another?

To find the answer, having filed a lawsuit, DECAA deposed the HPO staff, and under oath, they disclosed how HPO came to issue an unprecedented second contradictory report. They told us that the developer had called HPO saying it needed a boundary line that would allow the proposed Luxury Project. The call was immediately relayed to the head of the Office, the author of the first report was replaced, and, within a few days, HPO issued the second report, shamelessly kowtowing to the developer. That's how it happened. So, if you want to know in the DC Planning Office how to change a pro-constituent outcome to a pro-developer outcome, you have the answer. Have the developer make a phone call.

We don't know how kowtowing to the developer can be reconciled with the responsibilities and lofty goals under the Historic Preservation Act, to preserve precious resources, which HPO is set up to ensure?

This shameful display is repeated by an administration that fights its own residents in development projects throughout the city, McMillan Park, 801 Monroe, Brookland Manor, Park Morton, Bruce Monroe, SunTrust Plaza, The Wharf, Greenleaf, Hill East, Barry Farm, NOMA, Crummell School, Ivy City. The Mayor calls us outside agitators and changes the Comp Plan to defeat us. The developers are the outsiders, not us. We live here and we vote.

With the disgraceful departure of Jack Evans still in memory, we must question the peculiar alliance between this administration and developers, who walk off with taxpayer gifts and outrageous profits, devastating whole communities in their wake. There is no way the Mayor's the Comp Plan or the ambitious plans for affordable housing can ever be realized for those earning below 50% of Area Median Income, or for the homeless.

DECAA sees social housing as a solution to the housing crisis. As advocated by Will Merrifield, the housing is built by the city, like roads and utilities, and the residents manage the property, thus avoiding the corrupting influence of developers. We ask you to consider social housing as a plan for affordable housing that works.

Recently the Wardman Park Hotel announced bankruptcy. It is prime real estate, near the Metro with job training facilities, and it is already built. DECAA asks the city to buy it and to work with us in the community to make it a model of social housing and, for once, make a plan that can meet the housing needs of residents of the city.

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