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GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
Historic Preservation Review Board

Historic Preservation Review Board Hearing

McMillan Park Reservoir
Revised Master Plan and Design Guidelines

Property Address:
North Capitol and Michigan Avenue, N.W.

10:06 to 11:06 a.m.
Thursday, April 25, 2013

Room 220-South
441 4th Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C.

1 Board Members Present:

2

3 GRETCHEN PFAEHLER, CHAIRPERSON

4 CHARLES WILSON

5 ANDREW AUERBACH

6 ROBERT SONDERMAN

7 JOSEPH TAYLOR

8 GRAHAM DAVIDSON

9 NANCY METZGER

10 RAUZIA ALLY

11 MARIA CASARELLA

12

13 HPO Staff:

14

15 STEVE CALLCOTT

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1 P R O C E E D I N G S

2 [10:06 a.m.]

3 CHAIRPERSON PFAEHLER: The first item on
4 our full agenda is McMillan Park Reservoir.

5 We heard at the last meeting, a public
6 hearing, information. We listened to a
7 presentation from the Applicants. We heard from
8 the community. We had some testimony from the
9 ANC about that. We left the matter open for our
10 discussion, mostly due to time, so we didn't
11 compress our time for comments, to make sure we
12 gave good comments to the Applicants as they look
13 to move forward with the process.

14 We did have a letter from the ANC-1B that
15 came in with some concern about whether or not we
16 would give them great weight. I think we have
17 left the record open from our last meeting, and
18 the Board did not establish a position or define
19 our comments.

20 So there was still opportunity at the
21 time for the ANC to provide their comments to us,
22 and I just want to go down for the record as

1 well, there was a comment in the letter about
2 insufficient notice. The ANC Act requires
3 written notice be provided to ANCs 30 business
4 days in advance of the public hearing. The
5 notice for the Board's consideration of the
6 McMillan Master Plan was provided on March 11th,
7 which was actually 34 days before the hearing, so
8 we exceeded the minimum requirement of the days.

9 So the Staff of HPO as a part of OP has
10 complied with the legal requirements of notifying
11 the ANC, and in addition, because of the need for
12 us to provide our comments today, there is an
13 additional time that the ANC could have provided
14 information to us, but we don't have that
15 information, from what I understand.

16 So, with that, different than we usually
17 start it, I think we will start with some Board
18 comments, unless, Steve, is there anything that
19 Staff wants to add?

20 MR. CALLCOTT: [Shaking head no.]

21 CHAIRPERSON PFAEHLER: Why don't we start
22 with some Board comments, and to give it some

1 structure, I think it would be helpful if we
2 could structure our comments to focus on the
3 concept review, remembering that we are not
4 voting on this. We are providing recommendations
5 and comments as it relates to compliance with
6 historic significance, recognizing that this is
7 in some cases an adaptive reuse, and that we have
8 already had some dialog about impact on the
9 historic fabric and the degree of which that
10 happens.

11 Maybe, Steve, if you could give us a
12 little framework for that.

13 MR. CALLCOTT: I just wanted to let the
14 Board know that the Applicants have brought back
15 the PowerPoint presentation that you saw last
16 month, so that if there are particular images or
17 anything that you want to call up during the
18 course of your conversation, they have that
19 available.

20 CHAIRPERSON PFAEHLER: Oh, thank you.
21 Thank you.

22 And I think for the purposes of

1 discussion, if we could start in organizing, it
2 will help me to compile the comments if I could
3 ask the Board members, if you could start with
4 any comments that you have on the site first, the
5 overall site and landscape, and then go to the
6 roadway. That would include roadways, the
7 Olmsted Walk, and then if you could then talk
8 about the buildings and the site, the
9 construction effort from the north down to the
10 south, that would be helpful to me, if you don't
11 mind. Then I can compile everything.

12 Are there any questions? Are there any
13 questions from Board members about the case? Are
14 there any slides that you'd like to see from the
15 PowerPoint in advance?

16 MS. CASARELLA: I think it would be
17 helpful to have just an overall Master Plan up,
18 so we can refer to pieces of it while we're
19 discussing.

20 CHAIRPERSON PFAEHLER: Do you have a
21 particular -- do you want the site plan?

22 While they are doing that, are there any

1 clarification questions that folks have of the
2 Applicants?

3 [No audible response.]

4 CHAIRPERSON PFAEHLER: Is that helpful,
5 Maria?

6 [No audible response.]

7 CHAIRPERSON PFAEHLER: Okay. Great.
8 Would you be willing to start with your comments?

9 MS. CASARELLA: So I wrote down my
10 comments, just so I'm a little more coherent than
11 usual, but I just want to acknowledge the effort
12 that the team had gone through thus far. And I
13 realize what -- the pressure is all around on
14 everyone, the public and the team, to make this a
15 great place.

16 So I think thus far, the effort to
17 recognize the plinth elevation, its edges, the
18 paths, and the berms as organizing elements of
19 the plan is a great start, and from our position,
20 this landmark where we are removing 80 to 90
21 percent of it, there just has to be an
22 extraordinary effort to create a sort of unique

1 recollection of what is there through this new
2 Master Plan, so that's the standard. It is a
3 very high bar, I recognize.

4 But I feel right now, there still needs
5 -- a lot more work needs to be done on the plan,
6 and I think the design team really needs to have
7 the opportunity to design the urban spaces first,
8 rather than kind of what appears to be leftover
9 parcels of a kind of development strategy, if
10 that makes sense.

11 And that is my overall impression, is
12 that the site has been sort of parceled up into
13 pieces that various development teams can work
14 with and then from there making the best of the
15 situation, and I think really the reverse has to
16 happen, where the spaces have to be designed
17 first, and then what works with them should be
18 secondary.

19 So, beginning with -- the original
20 tripartite organization of the plan is not
21 recognizable, I think in this, in the current
22 strategy. It is really four quadrants that have

1 been separated by their use and by massing. I
2 think that strategy is sound planning in other
3 sites, but I think in this context, it doesn't --
4 it's not supporting really what the historic
5 resource is.

6 So, again, simply delegating the south
7 quadrant and part of the north quadrant as kind
8 of memorializing what was there is not impactful
9 enough across the whole site.

10 And, again, I think the above-ground
11 elements are still -- still feel like relics of
12 what was there, rather than activated pieces that
13 have program, that are visible across this whole
14 campus.

15 On that note as well, I think we really
16 need, moving forward, more detail on what
17 specifically is going to be retained of the
18 walls, the regulator houses, and the storage
19 bins. Right now, it's kind of vague in the plans
20 and, understandably, its concept, but those are
21 the pieces that we are charged to protect, so I
22 feel as though if we have a good documentation of

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1 how they are going to be used, I would have more
2 confidence in moving this forward.

3 We did -- generally, I don't think there
4 is a strong enough visual connection between the
5 North and South Service Courts, and my
6 impression, since now your experience of this
7 place is this vast plain with those elements
8 arising, it seems as though that visual
9 connection should drive the inner workings of the
10 plan more strongly.

11 And adding the streets that go east-west
12 seems to work against the strong, kind of
13 north-south connection between the two services
14 courts.

15 We did receive a letter from the
16 Committee of 100, which had, I think, a lot of
17 thoughtful questions, in particular, about the
18 park itself from the south quadrant, and I agree
19 with their comment that the way the park is set
20 up now, the vegetation along the southeast-west
21 edge -- I'm sorry -- northeast-west edge is
22 obscuring the relationship of the park to the

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1 above-ground elements there, and that maybe you
2 can rethink how you move through that.

3 And then there were questions about what
4 actually takes place on the green or their sports
5 fields and that sort of thing. That, we can get
6 into, but I do think the program of that matters,
7 since that is kind of what currently remains of
8 your experience of that plinth.

9 And, also, they noted more details to be
10 provided exactly how the Olmsted walk works
11 around the perimeter. I feel as though I
12 understand it, but maybe it's not clear enough
13 yet, the details of that walk, since that, again,
14 is one of the pieces we're charged in preserving
15 or re-creating, in this case.

16 So I think to kind of avoid this
17 four-quadrant approach and the abrupt scale
18 changes that you have now, you should consider
19 mixing the masses more from the blocks throughout
20 the site and orienting the secondary streets,
21 perhaps north-south, to create this kind of
22 continuous view across the site.

1 I think the North Service Court, the
2 northern most parcel, the health care piece, it
3 to me is very problematic because it is orienting
4 itself away from the site and perhaps inverting
5 that to face towards the site. I think this kind
6 of singular access with the space off of Michigan
7 Avenue sort of is splitting the site away and
8 sort of creating a relationship with a parking
9 lot across the street, rather than internalizing
10 it and sort of giving a definitive boundary to
11 this place.

12 I think the removal of the North Service
13 Court walls and the ramps on the north side of
14 that is problematic right now and kind of makes
15 the elements, the storage bins, appear like
16 they're in a traffic island, just from the
17 sections alone, the kind of massing of the
18 buildings adjacent to it and then the removal of
19 those walls and ramps. You don't have any sense
20 of their connection to what was there
21 underground. So if there's a clever way to make
22 that street section recall really what's there a

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1 little more strongly, I think that that would be
2 helpful. And I also -- I think these elements
3 should be retained to some degree.

4 So that's -- I think those are the extent
5 of my comments. I'm sure that's plenty.

6 CHAIRPERSON PFAEHLER: Thank you, Maria.
7 Bob, do you have any comments?

8 MR. SONDERMAN: Like all of us, I have
9 always been very uncomfortable with the level of
10 demolition, and I think that's just the way it
11 is. We have a landmark, and we're looking at
12 more than what we had traditionally looked at as
13 a level of demolition, whether it's a house or
14 whatever. And with that beginning, we all have
15 to take a look at what is the reality here, and
16 we need to do the best development job we can on
17 this space and retain as much of the historic
18 fabric of the landmark as we can.

19 I still -- with Maria, there was still
20 some question for me, how much we're going to
21 preserve and what are we going to do with those
22 areas that we are going to preserve, and many of

1 the architectural things are a little bit beyond
2 my expertise. I wish there were more
3 archeological opportunities here, but there are
4 not.

5 When I read the Committee of 100 letter,
6 it captured a lot of the -- it captured a lot of
7 what I was thinking about in terms of this
8 overall concept in the plan, and I acknowledge
9 that this is a monumental and excruciating task
10 to undertake, given the many hoops you have to
11 jump through. It must be very painful, and you
12 are going to get different views from every
13 member of the Board, I'm sure, that will make it
14 even -- perhaps more difficult.

15 CHAIRPERSON PFAEHLER: Can I ask you --

16 MR. SONDERMAN: Having spent a lot of
17 time at the hospital up there with children
18 through the years, I think to me, if it faces to
19 the north, then it turns its back on the
20 landmark, and I don't know how you manage that.
21 There has to be an entrance on the north side.
22 There has to be some sort of opening there to

1 make it attractive, but it also has to have an
2 opportunity to enclose and wrap itself around the
3 landmark, and I'm not sure how you do that
4 architecturally.

5 But those are my few comments, and I'll
6 leave it at that.

7 CHAIRPERSON PFAEHLER: Okay. Can I ask
8 you a question about one of your comments, just
9 so I'm clear? When you said you're uncomfortable
10 with the level, with the amount -- I don't recall
11 whether you said you were uncomfortable with the
12 amount of demolition or you're uncomfortable with
13 the size of this project and the demolition
14 associated with it.

15 MR. SONDERMAN: No, it's just I -- it
16 doesn't matter about the size. It's an object
17 you have. Either it's a house or whatever. You
18 have a landmark, and our guidelines, generally,
19 have been if you are demolishing more than 60
20 percent, it's demolition. I know this is going
21 to the Mayor's Agent --

22 CHAIRPERSON PFAEHLER: Right.

1 MR. SONDERMAN: -- but, at the same time,
2 apples and oranges are the same in this case.
3 You have a historic structure, and we are -- the
4 Board is in the position of agreeing that we need
5 to demolish more than 50 percent of this historic
6 structure.

7 CHAIRPERSON PFAEHLER: Right. And then
8 within the --

9 MR. SONDERMAN: And I've just been
10 uncomfortable with that.

11 CHAIRPERSON PFAEHLER: Yeah. And then
12 within the guidelines, it says if we are
13 demolishing a significant amount, then we go to
14 the D.C. Comprehensive Plan Guidelines.

15 MR. SONDERMAN: Right. I mean, it's not
16 that I disapprove of the process at all. It's
17 just I am personally uncomfortable. That's all.

18 CHAIRPERSON PFAEHLER: Okay.
19 Andrew?

20 MR. AURBACH: I just wanted to echo the
21 sentiments expressed by Ms. Casarella regarding
22 both the community side and the efforts with the

1 development team to evolve this process over the
2 many, many years that it's been taking place.
3 And probably, on behalf of the Board, I wanted to
4 thank everyone last week and over the previous
5 meetings for coming out, making your voices
6 heard, and being a part of the process.

7 So, with that, I, too, was somewhat taken
8 by the Committee of 100 comments. I thought that
9 their letter provided a lot of insight into some
10 of the issues related to this.

11 I think my main comments related to the
12 site, that I, you know, agree with the idea that
13 our job is to protect the landmark, but, at the
14 same time, understanding reality and
15 understanding that this is going to the Mayor's
16 Agent, that there will be flexibility here. But
17 we are tasked with protecting landmarks.

18 I think that the main two considerations
19 that I would ask are to the vehicular traffic
20 and the street flow in terms of as much of a
21 complete street solution as possible, so that
22 there's as much comfort level by the community to

1 access the site in as safe a manner as possible.
2 I think the access to the site is vital not only
3 for the community but also to the success of the
4 program.

5 Second, I think the design considerations
6 for the structures that will be taking place
7 there do need to be exemplary, and, obviously,
8 you've given a lot of thought to it and given us
9 material treatment and whatnot. But I think
10 going forward, as we see the proposals for what
11 is to come, I would just want to reiterate that
12 design excellence that we'll want to see.

13 Finally, the interpretation of what is
14 there -- and I raised this previously, but just
15 making sure there is appropriate signage and
16 interpretation for visitors to understand the
17 landmark and potentially if there's an
18 opportunity for also a virtual interpretation, so
19 it's not just signage, but a way for people to
20 access in the future through their portable
21 devices and online, whatnot, I think that would
22 be appropriate to be able to show graphically how

1 the water was pumped and filtered through the
2 site. I think that will be important for future
3 generations to understand.

4 CHAIRPERSON PFAEHLER: Thank you, Andrew.
5 Rauzia?

6 MS. ALLY: I just have a couple quick
7 comments about the layout. I think I'm a little
8 bit uncomfortable with the -- I guess, the height
9 of the buildings on the north side by the
10 historic structures. I just feel like it
11 encroaches too much, and I still wonder whether
12 flipping the -- that plaza you have along
13 Michigan Avenue to the other side and creating an
14 open area instead of creating a garden along
15 Michigan, to put it on the other side along the
16 south.

17 CHAIRPERSON PFAEHLER: So the buildings
18 run this way with a central court?

19 MS. ALLY: Yes.

20 CHAIRPERSON PFAEHLER: So these flip, so
21 the L goes like this and the L goes like that,
22 with a court in the middle?

1 MS. ALLY: Would allow less encroachment
2 on those, on those buildings.

3 I understand the thinking in putting that
4 area, meditation area along Michigan Avenue. I
5 just don't think that it would work very well,
6 and I think that it would allow the historic
7 structures to have a little bit more breathing
8 room.

9 I also was taking something -- I can't
10 remember who it was that said -- or asked a
11 question about -- last time, which was in the
12 housing, the row houses, and why we couldn't have
13 multifamily housing, and I think it would be good
14 to look at doing multifamily housing in that
15 area.

16 Otherwise, I agree with the comments of
17 Andrew. I hope that we get -- those become a
18 teaching tool, and that we can -- not just for
19 the people that live in that area but for the
20 residents of D.C. and elsewhere.

21 And that's about it. Thanks.

22 CHAIRPERSON PFAEHLER: Thank you.

1 Joseph.

2 MR. TAYLOR: It sounds like you need a
3 McMillan Reservoir app to make sure that the
4 message gets out, and that's a good thing. As
5 they say, so many of them are free. So, if you
6 could develop that, that might tie in with what
7 Andrew said about signage and also being able to
8 inform what was there and what you are presenting
9 new and how you dealt with that.

10 A lot of my concerns have been expressed
11 in the Committee of 100 communications and my
12 colleagues to my right, so I have just a few
13 points.

14 I think one area of concern is the north
15 end, and Raazia was exactly right. The historic
16 fabric of the site needs some breathing room, so
17 you have a plaza that's open to Michigan Avenue,
18 and that sort of speaks to traffic on Michigan
19 Avenue and what's across the road, if you will.

20 And then you have a bottleneck that sort
21 of gets into the bosom of the site, and I think
22 you need to do the reverse, open up a vista or a

1 viewpoint into the site and have a long-term
2 linkage to the southern edge of the site, and
3 that's -- I think it's the beginning of a better
4 approach.

5 The northeast corner is still problematic
6 to me where perhaps a better approach is a more
7 serious adaptive reuse of the historic elements
8 there as opposed to them being left there and
9 letting them be. So we are reusing this site, so
10 maybe take a look at reusing existing elements in
11 a more meaningful way.

12 Another thing, when you have this site
13 developed and populated, I think it's important
14 that if you live there and you come back to this
15 site from where you've been during the day, that
16 you have passing and active recreational options
17 within the site. So give some thought to what
18 can you -- how can you be self-contained when you
19 live there as opposed to having to leave the site
20 for some activities as relates to the open space.

21 And to Maria's point, I think you can do
22 both in terms of develop the buildings and

1 develop the open spaces and not make one an
2 afterthought but bring them both up together, so
3 that they have high level of success.

4 And those are my comments.

5 CHAIRPERSON PFAEHLER: Thank you, Joseph.
6 Graham?

7 MR. DAVIDSON: The entirety of the
8 historic site is actually 113 acres, and so what
9 we're talking about here is 22 percent of the
10 historic site, and what we're talking about
11 placing buildings on is somewhat less than that.
12 So, in that perspective, I am less concerned than
13 others about developing -- the concept of placing
14 development on this site and the concept of
15 demolishing a substantial portion of the site
16 because, yes, it's a substantial portion of this
17 site, but of the overall historic site, it's much
18 less than one might imagine.

19 A side comment on the rest of the site to
20 the west here, I think it would be great if the
21 community spent a little -- as much time as they
22 can to work with the Federal Government in trying

1 to improve the looks of that site and perhaps
2 gain access to more of that site. It was
3 originally designed to be largely for recreation
4 around the reservoir and on the south side. I
5 realize that in today's world, we have to fence
6 off the reservoir, but it would be great if we
7 could reclaim some parking lots and put back the
8 fountain in some reasonable way, so that it was
9 restored once again to be the centerpiece of the
10 more romantic park on the west. Nonetheless,
11 that's not before us today.

12 So, moving back to our site, it would --
13 I think it's interesting also to think about the
14 concept of coming in, in today's world, and
15 proposing that we are going to take a sloping
16 piece of topography and level it for 25 acres. I
17 don't think -- I think we have quite a few
18 members of the community here that would object
19 to that concept, and so it's really -- you know,
20 as we move forward and look at other plans, I
21 think it's interesting to think about the fact
22 that what we might today think is unthinkable

1 results in really the creation of a very, very
2 unique place.

3 All that said, I think the current plan
4 suffers from two things. One is that because the
5 area of the plan that's been devoted to the park
6 placed on the south has been increased somewhat,
7 the resulting development has acted like a
8 balloon, and it has pushed the boundaries of the
9 site on the north, such that the entirety of the
10 site loses its sense of place.

11 And, secondly, the development of the
12 park itself on the south side of the -- the
13 design for the park on the south side has been
14 belabored so much that the sense of place has
15 been lost, and, yes, we've created another place.
16 And it's a perfectly nice place, but it's a
17 completely different place.

18 So in order, I think -- so to go back to
19 my first point, I think the site as a whole, we
20 need to figure out how to retain the sense of the
21 entirety of this east portion of the site as the
22 sand filtration plant, and the northern

1 two-thirds, as I said, has lost any of that
2 connection. And so, at the very least, I think
3 we need to pull the buildings back from the side
4 streets to retain a lot more of -- or the Olmsted
5 Walk and its perimeter plantings and some space
6 around the perimeter. I share the concerns with
7 the north side development.

8 Certainly, we need to retain several
9 contiguous sand filters. I can't remember in
10 this iteration whether we have those contiguous
11 sand filters retained below the surface or not.

12 I don't think there should be traffic on
13 the South Service Court, except for emergency
14 traffic. That should be left as a service court
15 in its original configuration as opposed to being
16 a place for cars and oil.

17 And with respect to the park itself, you
18 know, the current -- an example of the creation
19 of a new place is the -- is the depressed area on
20 the southeast, where we have dug a hole into the
21 earth and opened it up to North Capitol Street.

22 We just heard a couple of months ago, the

1 request to lower the west portion of this area
2 because of the reservoir for storm water, and we
3 all decided that that was not a good idea, that
4 the plinth should be maintained.

5 And now we have a Master Plan that
6 proposes to take the east side and drop it down
7 to grade, and so I think that we should retain
8 the plinth on the south side of the site intact.
9 Whether that means we refer to the stream that
10 used to be there or not, I don't know, but
11 there's a lot of interesting things about the
12 landscape plan. But I think it's -- as I said,
13 it's created a place that belongs somewhere else,
14 and it's ruined this sense of place that is here,
15 which is a sentiment that was expressed by many,
16 many people as we heard during the testimony over
17 the days that we have heard comments.

18 And, lastly, moving onto the guidelines
19 and the development of the specific buildings, I
20 think the guidelines are fine as far as they go,
21 but going back again to retaining the sense of
22 place and the coherence of this very rigid

1 landscape, what's currently proposed is to quote
2 the National Register form, "large-scale
3 mixed-use development." That's what's proposed,
4 and it also sounds an awful lot like Tysons
5 Corner or Rosslyn, a suburban office park. We
6 can't -- this site cannot -- will completely lose
7 its sense of place on the north end if we get a
8 Rosslyn or a suburban office park, and so I think
9 the guidelines need to be more specific, a little
10 bit more rigid, so that the buildings hold
11 together much more than one might expect in just
12 a randomly developed portion of the city.

13 They need to hold together in the same
14 way that the site itself currently holds itself
15 together, as a uniform plinth with very regular
16 geometries, with a very consistent set of
17 materials, so that the buildings that are
18 developed and the development that occurs has
19 that same -- refers to the site in the same way,
20 in the same, very rigid, and formalistic way.

21 We might look at the Federal Triangle,
22 for instance, as an example of a Master Plan

1 development that occurred, where the idea -- the
2 plan was developed, and then a number of
3 buildings were developed by all different
4 architects, but they all hold together very well.
5 That may be too rigid for most of you, but I
6 think that that's -- that's more along the lines
7 of where we need to head than just allowing a
8 suburban office park to be developed, which I
9 think the current guidelines would allow.

10 Maybe a better current example for a set
11 of guidelines might be CityCenter. It's hard to
12 tell since we don't really see what that's going
13 to look like quite yet, but that was designed,
14 the overall plan was designed by a few hands and
15 buildings. There are a number of different
16 buildings within that, that strongly relate to
17 one another to create a fairly cohesive
18 development of buildings, that relate strongly to
19 one another and form a community within the rest
20 of the city.

21 So I think we do need to respect the
22 tripartite organization of the site. We need to

1 respect the boundaries of the site, and all of
2 this is working toward what I think should be the
3 retention as much as possible, given the
4 development that is going to occur on the north,
5 a retention of the sense of place that exists
6 there that I think the current plan is still not
7 sufficient to retain.

8 CHAIRPERSON PFAEHLER: Thank you, Graham.
9 Charles?

10 MR. WILSON: No comments at this time.
11 Thank you.

12 CHAIRPERSON PFAEHLER: Thanks.
13 Nancy.

14 MS. METZGER: Once again, I'd like to
15 thank all the team for their efforts over these
16 last many months -- years, because you are
17 responding to the comments that you hear and
18 other information that you are getting and also
19 the community and everyone who has commented. I,
20 too, was very struck by the Committee of 100
21 letter because they were saying lots of things
22 that I was thinking, so, of course, I would be

1 struck by it.

2 Maria's and Graham's comments in
3 particular and everyone else's are parts of the
4 things that I have also been thinking and
5 feeling.

6 To me, the sense of place is what is so
7 important here. I mean, I can remember walking
8 up that ramp onto the plinth and just feeling
9 this wonderful sense of openness. Just
10 everywhere I looked, there was sky. There was
11 these views. There was just this -- and I can
12 only describe it as openness. If I had been
13 younger, I would have wanted to do cartwheels and
14 tumbled down the banks and all those things,
15 because it gives you joy. You come out of a
16 neighborhood that's dense, row houses, and then
17 all of a sudden, you've got this space. And I
18 think that's the sense of place in one way that
19 this landmark gives to the entire city, but
20 certainly, definitely to this community.

21 I think there is a built-in tension. We
22 haven't seen this tension. The Olmsted Walk with

1 the hawthorn trees, in a sense, constricts that,
2 but I think it's very important to do that.
3 There were certainly generations that felt that
4 little bit of boundary into this space, and so
5 the Olmsted Walk, even though there is this
6 tension that it provides, is certainly very
7 important.

8 But I think that having said that, I
9 think what else is introduced into that park has
10 to be very carefully considered in light of the
11 sense of openness, and I was very concerned about
12 all the trees that were introduced into the
13 middle of the park or that northern edge of that
14 park, because it has reduced the width visually
15 of the park by almost half.

16 I went the other day down to Garfield
17 Park, which is 290 feet from the freeway to
18 Second Street, which is about what plinth is at
19 that south end, and that is enough to give you
20 that sense of openness, even though there were
21 trees in the way in Garfield Park, but half of
22 that, not really so much.

1 So I think in the desire to make a
2 pleasant place, as we think of it now, I think it
3 has to be very careful about how that's done and
4 how the openness is whittled away. There can be
5 lovely things there. There's Garfield. There's
6 bocce court, somebody talking about recreation.
7 I mean, they can be low things that still retain
8 the sense of openness, that still generate the
9 community feeling, whatever, which is -- so it's
10 not to say it just has to be grass. That is not
11 what I mean, but I do think the introduction of
12 trees and particularly in an alley form where all
13 of a sudden you are repeating the Olmsted Walk
14 pattern would cause people to think, "Oh. Well,
15 they had trees down here." This is a false sense
16 of what was there. I think needs to be really
17 dedicated about --

18 I think one of the things that I was most
19 taken with, and as Graham said, it's a very
20 lovely little park there, but the sense of -- we
21 had been seeing these images of the French park
22 and the Australian park with these arches, and

1 all of a sudden, this little park gets columns.
2 That's not enough to give the sense of what so
3 many of us responded to when we went down into
4 the underground portion. It just doesn't
5 translate for me, perhaps others.

6 And then the North Service Court has
7 always been a concern for me, and I certainly --
8 I think it was Rauzia who, once again, was
9 flipping it. So I think you have the sense of
10 the -- what many of us feel about with that area.

11 But I would also like to talk about the
12 Olmsted Walk at that end because the Olmsted
13 Walk, for whatever reason, is a very gently
14 curving walk at that place. No other place is it
15 like that, and why the walk got straightened at
16 that point and the curve was translated down into
17 the park, I think the Olmsted Walk itself -- and
18 I see puzzled looks, but I think I am correct
19 that there is a straight line across there.

20 The top walk, the one by the -- that's
21 the, quote, sidewalk -- looks very straight,
22 except the corner.

1 MS. CORBETT: The public sidewalk is
2 straight because the public sidewalk is required
3 to be straight. The Olmsted Walk is curved, so
4 do you see that there's --

5 MS. METZGER: Right. Yeah. No, I see
6 that.

7 CHAIRPERSON PFAEHLER: So the public
8 sidewalk --

9 MS. METZGER: The one that you --

10 CHAIRPERSON PFAEHLER: Yeah, the public
11 sidewalk needs to be linear. We can't have a
12 curved linear by code, a curved linear, but then
13 what Nancy is saying is that the remnants of the
14 Olmsted pull into the garden; whereas, they were
15 more continuous along the north edge on Michigan
16 Avenue.

17 Nancy, is that correct?

18 MS. METZGER: Yeah. I mean, I didn't
19 realize that the public sidewalk had to be just
20 straight.

21 MS. CORBETT: It has to be a regular
22 distance from the curb, from the --

1 MR. BELL: There is a concern about
2 pedestrian --

3 MS. METZGER: Can it start at the curb?

4 MR. BELL: We did talk to DDOT here, and
5 there is a concern about the pedestrian --

6 CHAIRPERSON PFAEHLER: I'm sorry. I'm
7 sorry. You'll have to say your names again for
8 the record, although we've met you many times at
9 many meetings.

10 MR. BELL: I'm Matt Bell.

11 CHAIRPERSON PFAEHLER: Thank you, Matt.

12 [Laughter.]

13 MR. BELL: There is a concern about stop
14 bar for cars and pedestrian conflicts and things
15 there that we're trying to work out with DDOT.
16 We do have to have that as a straight sidewalk
17 across there on the edge of that street.

18 MS. METZGER: Okay. Well, that's -- I
19 just find it a really unfortunate variation of
20 the Olmsted Walk because the other was such a
21 clear -- this was a very different thing than
22 what --

1 MR. BELL: Yeah. We just made this
2 graphic to show -- Nelson Byrd Woltz made this
3 graphic to show the interpretation of it here
4 with the existing condition today or at least how
5 the hawthorn trees were with our interpretation
6 here.

7 MS. METZGER: Okay.

8 MR. BELL: The elevated path in the park
9 and then how we're proposing it along the edge
10 here.

11 MS. METZGER: Okay. Is the walk that you
12 are proposing set down into the bank, or is it up
13 near the top?

14 MR. BELL: On Michigan?

15 MS. METZGER: Yeah.

16 MR. BELL: On Michigan, it would be along
17 the street level there, and the Olmsted -- the
18 curvilinear nature of this would be -- that slope
19 comes down somewhat, so it would be down
20 approximately where it was here, a little bit,
21 inside that park.

22 MS. METZGER: Okay. Thank you.

1 CHAIRPERSON PFAEHLER: Thanks, Nancy.

2 So I'll give a few of my comments, and
3 then I'll take on the auspicious job of
4 summarizing this.

5 As a segue to give myself some breathing
6 room, I will approximately recognize everybody's
7 efforts for this. I realize that it's no small
8 effort that's gone into the development of this.
9 I know there have been significant numbers of
10 hours and intellects involved in this, so we're
11 very much appreciative of not only the D.C.
12 staff, DMPED, the ANCs, the public, the
13 consultants, we know that you all have a
14 significant investment into this and are very
15 interested in making the highest and best use and
16 recognizing the heritage of this sight.

17 It shows from the rework that you did
18 with the D.C. Water change that was required for
19 storm water management and the readdressing that
20 you did of the design of the site in coming up
21 with a new solution for the park. It shows -- in
22 my mind, the solution that you developed for the

1 park shows that you have a strong understanding
2 of why this spot is significant. You are showing
3 all the layers of history there, including the
4 stream that was the precursor to the location of
5 the storm, the sand filters construction.

6 I think that from my consideration of the
7 proposal and the guidelines as they're developed
8 here, I think that I concur with my colleagues
9 about the preservation of the plinth edge and the
10 berm. I think you have a very good start of
11 that.

12 I would say, in deference to some of my
13 colleagues, the lowering of the southeast section
14 with the maintenance of the berm around the
15 perimeter isn't as disturbing to me as a complete
16 clearing of that site, so it's flat to the street
17 on North Capitol and Channing. I like that idea
18 of being able to see down into that and giving
19 folks an opportunity. I think the architecture
20 should be developed to further clarify that
21 that's what's happening.

22 And to one of my other colleague's

1 comments about interpretation, I think there's
2 lots of opportunity as both for extrovertedly
3 assigning and explaining and activities that can
4 happen there, but even in something as simple as
5 the form and the shape of the architecture should
6 be a little more evolved to recognize the
7 structures that were there, not to replicate or
8 convey false providence, of course, but something
9 should talk a little more strongly about what
10 used to exist on this site.

11 I do think that the remaining historic
12 objects on the site and the service courts have
13 been sort of isolated as relics and objects, and
14 I'll just put my little material conservation
15 pitch in here.

16 In many of your renderings, you show ivy
17 growing on these sand filters. Please do not let
18 that happen; otherwise, they will be paying a lot
19 of folks for masonry restoration. I realize it
20 looks romantic, yeah, but don't do it.

21 But finding a way to activate those
22 features within the property, this property has a

1 tension that happens within it. You have this
2 challenge of this tripartite solution that is
3 very introvertedly focused, but, also, now you're
4 trying to make it have an extraverted reaction.
5 In many of the cases we view, we are talking
6 about a site or a property and its relationship
7 to its surrounding perimeters, so you have that
8 tension, as well as because of the degree of
9 demolition that we're talking about here and the
10 change to this landmark property, you have this
11 internal tension as well in maintaining the
12 sense. And so the balance of those things, I
13 think you are starting to get there. I do feel
14 like it would be better if we could go to
15 something that felt like a more tripartite
16 solution.

17 So the midblock roadways, I'd want you to
18 look at whether you really need all of those
19 midblock roadways. I can't remember the names of
20 them. I think they're no there, but so the two
21 roadways that you're proposing between the
22 service courts, do you really need those for the

1 circulation, and can the service courts perform
2 that function?

3 If you are going to have a ramp at the
4 northwest corner into the service court to work
5 through the grades and make everything work, I
6 think the way that wall is detailed, the steps,
7 and how they react to the sand bins needs to be
8 carefully refined and communicated. I think we
9 understand the concept, and the concept that
10 you're proposing the way it works with the
11 sequence of sections you provided us put those
12 sand bins at risk of seeming like big pile-ons
13 that are in a median, and it creates a barrier
14 for folks.

15 You may necessarily need to think about
16 how pedestrians circulate, and maybe they don't
17 cross at grade. Maybe they go underneath, and
18 then the ramp can happen more gradually. Maybe
19 there's another solution to allow for a safe
20 pedestrian and vehicular circulation to happen
21 simultaneously.

22 I do also think that the location of the

1 garden at the north end on Michigan Avenue seems
2 a little discontinuous, and this is perhaps where
3 the tension between the internal and the external
4 focus matters.

5 And I do think also in reading some of
6 the other -- and listening to some of the
7 testimony we had, both from your presentation and
8 from, I think it was, Georgetown University Law
9 Center about open space and maintain open space,
10 I think it behooves us -- and the comment that
11 somebody made about the -- I think it was Graham
12 -- made about the reservoir and the park, this is
13 not the only open space in this community, but
14 thinking about how this open space can recall the
15 views, the character of what was there is a big
16 challenge with the amount of development that
17 needs to be integrated into this site.

18 But small things like bringing that park
19 into the interior so the service court and the
20 open space create more of an area that's
21 introverted to the site rather than extroverted,
22 especially with the traffic, degree of traffic I

1 think that's on Michigan Avenue and the speed at
2 which it travels, I think that allows you also an
3 opportunity to re-create a bit more accurately
4 the continuity of the curvilinear Olmsted path
5 that went along the top. I think you have a
6 start towards it, but I think you have an
7 opportunity to bring the green space into the
8 block and allow for that tableau of grass that's
9 there now to have a bit more legibility and
10 understandability and harken back to what was
11 there, and it allows you to re-create that
12 Olmsted path a little more true and continuously
13 along that north edge.

14 I also concur with one of my colleague's
15 comments about the fact that when the park on the
16 south end was created, that seems to have pushed
17 up the development into the northern end of the
18 site, and, unfortunately, it balloons out a
19 little bit in the middle. I think -- and you did
20 show a diagram earlier when we were talking about
21 the continuity of the Olmsted path, but I think
22 there is an importance to the linearity and the

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1 continuity of the Olmsted path as it travels
2 along North Cap and First Street. Because it's
3 such a contrast to the curvilinear path along
4 Michigan, I think it's an important bounding
5 edge.

6 I think in some of the comments that we
7 had and in the information you provided us that
8 your concept for differentiating the Olmsted path
9 with the recycled or reclaimed pavers and the
10 plantings and the hawthorn tree and the species
11 are very appropriate to Olmsted and I think a
12 very creative solution to the reuse of the site.

13 The last comment that I have before I
14 summarize is that I think that because of the
15 degree of demolition that we're talking about, I
16 think that there are a couple of things that need
17 to be furthered, and I think you've made great
18 progress on them, but they need to be pushed a
19 little farther.

20 The first would be compliance with the
21 D.C. Comprehensive Plan in its description of
22 open space and view sheds. I think the view

1 sheds and highlighting them, I think you've gone
2 a great way in developing that now, but I think
3 there's a little bit of pushing in terms of the
4 volumes and the shapes of the buildings that need
5 to be there.

6 The other part of that is creating
7 exemplary architecture. I realize when you see a
8 block form when we're talking about use of space,
9 it's easy to think, "Well, that's a large block
10 of building," but even in the scale of the
11 housing, the continuity of it, maybe there's some
12 spaces, more finer grain, urban open spaces that
13 could exist that reflect more the character of
14 some of the Bloomingdale neighborhood spaces, but
15 the office buildings, the MOB office buildings on
16 the north end and the housing really need to be
17 of exemplary architecture, and they need to find
18 a way architecturally to reach back to the
19 significance of the place.

20 I think the guidelines that you have
21 start to go there, and the reference to color and
22 materials are appropriate, but it could be

1 strengthened in terms of the quality and caliber
2 of design. This is really a very unique heritage
3 feature that we have within our midst, and in
4 order to accommodate the demolition and reuse of
5 it, I think, in a way that's in compliance, the
6 caliber of what replaces what is there now should
7 be equal or exceed that caliber. And, rightfully
8 so, we haven't seen that yet, but I just want to
9 reemphasize that that's what we will be looking
10 for when we look at the architecture for all the
11 areas.

12 So summarizing -- and I will say that I
13 think that the culmination of comments that we
14 have from the Board seem to be fairly unified in
15 that we're very appreciative of the effort that's
16 been put forward. It's been -- great progress
17 has been made every step in the conversations
18 that we've had with everybody along the way, and
19 I think there's a really positive interaction
20 that's happened between the consultants, the
21 Mayor's -- the DMPED, and D.C. Water, and the
22 community in every interaction that they've had.

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1 One of the things that we'd like to have
2 maintained in terms of its strength is the edge,
3 and we've talked about it from the beginning, is
4 the idea of this plinth with its berm and its
5 edge and the Olmsted Walk. I think there's merit
6 to looking at the continuity of the curvilinear
7 Olmsted Walk as it's in contrast to the
8 rectilinear path that circumnavigates the site
9 and the edge.

10 The continuity of the berm is important,
11 and I think the location of the park at the south
12 end of the site and the maintenance of that berm
13 and the re-creation of the stairs that climb that
14 berm and even the new proposed ramps that go up
15 and down on Channing Street are appropriate. I
16 know one of the challenges for the community with
17 that berm was that it made the site feel
18 unapproachable, and the integration of the ramps
19 that you've proposed along the berm, I think, are
20 an appropriate way to reach out to the community.

21 So, even though this site maintains its
22 identity as a place, it's not a place separate

1 from but a place that's a part of the
2 Bloomingdale neighborhood and accessible to them.

3 I think that as you look at traffic and
4 circulation, both vehicular and pedestrian and
5 public transportation and bicycles, it is
6 important to continue to find ways, so the
7 community feels welcome and that they are a part
8 of what develops at that site as well.

9 The remaining historic objects shouldn't
10 just be treated as objects, the sand filters, the
11 other construction item -- the construction
12 building should be integrated in and an activated
13 part of the solution for the use of this site,
14 and perhaps that's just the level of programming
15 that we're seeing right now in the renderings.
16 We see people passing through, but we don't know
17 what the plan is, so clarity on that, so they're
18 not just objects that are tombstones of what was
19 there, but are an active part of the viability
20 and reuse of the site would be important to us.

21 And then looking at the organization of
22 the site back to a tripartite from the, I guess,

1 quadripartite -- I'm not good at my Latin --
2 going back to a three-part from a four-part
3 solution would be more beneficial in terms of
4 recognition of the original organization of the
5 site. And I don't think that's impossible to do
6 with the uses that you are showing midblock, so
7 some reorganization of how that works in order to
8 gain a three-part solution would be a way that
9 would allow you to integrate in new uses but
10 recognize the formalism and the geometry of the
11 original construction of the property.

12 The last thing I think that you heard
13 from everybody was -- as a summary comment, is
14 the quality of the architecture, and the
15 architectural solutions need to be specific to
16 this site, not speculative. I know you are not
17 proposing -- I hope you are not proposing
18 speculative. It doesn't sound like it, but as
19 the architecture for both the housing and the
20 medical office buildings and the mixed use come
21 forward, they should be specific to this place.

22 They will also have the challenge of the

1 tension of this place that always was sort of
2 separate from Bloomingdale because of its
3 industrial utility function, and having a
4 dialogue with the Bloomingdale neighborhood and
5 the district across the street will always be a
6 challenge and a tension that they face, but the
7 caliber and the quality of the architecture
8 should really be exemplary and of the GSA's
9 style, design excellence definition, I think is
10 appropriate because of the heritage and the
11 quality of this site that exists there and the
12 degree of change that we're talking about.

13 I'd just close by saying that the Board,
14 from what I hear on the Board, and the comments
15 that I heard today and my own opinion is that
16 we're not opposed to development on this site.
17 We recognize that history is to be recognized,
18 and we need to live with it and the challenge is
19 maintaining a viable space as we live with the
20 history.

21 And it appears that you are very well on
22 the way to doing that, but these comments are

1 ways that we think you could further enhance the
2 respect for the heritage of this site and
3 possibly further integrate into it an
4 attractiveness of quality that would make it
5 special enough that folks would invest an
6 additional effort into recognizing it too, so
7 it's not a run-of-the-mill site, no offense of
8 Tysons Corner or other locations. I know the
9 economics of those spaces are different, but,
10 certainly, this is a special case, and I think we
11 all recognize that, as well as you recognize it
12 from the effort that you put forward, so thank
13 you.

14 We won't be voting on this one. We have
15 just provided our comments to you, and if there
16 are any clarifications, we invite you to approach
17 the HPO Staff. We're glad to do that. All
18 right? Thank you very much. Thank you again for
19 your effort.

20 [Whereupon, at 11:06 a.m., the excerpt of
21 the HPRB meeting, the McMillan Park Reservoir,
22 concluded.]