



**National Trust for
Historic Preservation**
Save the past. Enrich the future.

June 26, 2013

Chair and Members of the Board
D.C. Historic Preservation Review Board
1100 4th Street, SW, Suite E650
Washington, DC 20024

Re: McMillan Park Reservoir, 2501 First St. NW
HPA 13-#318, Concept review

To the Members of the D.C. Historic Preservation Review Board,

On behalf of the National Trust for Historic Preservation, I am writing to express our objections to the proposed conceptual plan for development of the McMillan Park Reservoir sand filtration site at 2501 First St. NW. This concept plan is scheduled to be reviewed by the Historic Preservation Review Board (HPRB) on June 27, 2013.

Interests of the National Trust.

The National Trust was chartered by Congress in 1949 as a private nonprofit organization to facilitate public participation in the preservation of our nation's heritage, and to further the historic preservation policy of the United States. See 16 U.S.C. § 468. With the strong support of our members around the country, the National Trust works to protect significant historic sites and to advocate historic preservation as a fundamental value in programs and policies at all levels of government. The National Trust has also been designated by Congress as a member of the federal Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, 16 U.S.C. § 470i(a)(8), which oversees the implementation of Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA), *id.* § 470f, 36 C.F.R. Part 800, and assists other federal agencies in complying with Section 106.

The National Trust has been concerned about the protection of the McMillan Park Reservoir site for decades. Back in 1990, we joined as a plaintiff in a lawsuit against the National Capital Planning Commission (NCPC) to enforce federal compliance with Section 106 of the NHPA, in connection with the federal transfer of this historic property to the District of Columbia and the NCPC's amendment to the D.C. Comprehensive Plan to allow development of the site.¹

The Proposed Development is Incompatible with the Historic Character of the McMillan Park Reservoir Site.

The height, scale, density, massing, and design of the proposed new construction is inappropriate for the historic McMillan Park Reservoir site and inconsistent with the overall character, landscape, and historic vistas of the site.

¹ *McMillan Park Committee, et al. v. National Capital Planning Comm'n*, 759 F. Supp. 908 (D.D.C. 1991), *rev'd in part on other grounds*, 968 F.2d 1283 (D.C. Cir. 1992).

Residential Rowhouses. Although the National Trust supports the inclusion of affordable housing as part of the redevelopment of the McMillan Park Reservoir site, the proposed siting and design of 161 townhouses is not compatible with the historic character of the McMillan Park site. The townhouses loom too close to the south maintenance corridor, and the proposed design seems generic and needlessly “busy,” with no relationship to any character-defining features of the historic site.

Grocery Store/Apartment Building. The National Trust does not oppose the concept of including a grocery store and apartments as part of the redevelopment. However, the massive height and bulk of the proposal here would loom over and dominate the sand filtration towers in the northern maintenance corridor. The proposed design of the apartment building has been characterized by the Friends of McMillan Park as a “hideous and hulking monstrosity, which resembles a cross between a mausoleum and a Soviet apartment block.”

Medical Office Buildings. The massing, scale, height, and design of these buildings is perhaps most incompatible with the historic character of the McMillan site. These need to be substantially scaled back.

Community Center and Park. We have no specific objections to this portion of the plan, but we support the staff recommendation that the mechanical penthouse structure on top of the recreation center should be reduced or eliminated.

The Proposed Development Does Not Comply with the Covenants That Conditioned the Sale of the Land from the Federal Government to the District.

We urge the Review Board to consider carefully the requirements of the perpetual covenants that were attached to the McMillan Park Reservoir property as a condition of sale when the McMillan site was transferred to the District of Columbia government in 1987 from the federal General Services Administration (GSA). Those historic preservation covenants specifically require two things that are relevant here:

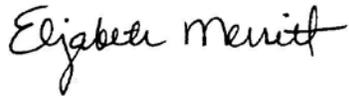
- The D.C. Historic Preservation Officer (HPO) must review all preliminary and final plans and specifications for renovation, rehabilitation, demolition, or new construction within the site, and if the HPO does not “agree with” the preliminary or final plans, and the disagreement cannot be resolved, the District must immediately request the comments of the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation in accordance with 36 CFR Part 800.
- The covenants specifically require that any and all rehabilitation and renovation work at the parcel will be undertaken in accordance with the *Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation and Guidelines for Rehabilitating Historic Buildings*. The proposed conceptual plans certainly do not conform to the *Secretary’s Standards*, especially because of the proposed destruction of the vast majority of the below-grade cells.

It is worth stepping back to recall that the whole purpose of the preservation covenants was to ensure that the transfer of the property from the federal government to the District of Columbia in 1987 would have “no adverse effect” on historic properties. Based on the historic preservation covenants, which were revised in response to comments from the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, the GSA concluded that the sale would have no adverse

effect on historic properties, and the Advisory Council concurred in that determination. The proposed development plans certainly call into question the validity of that Section 106 determination.

In closing, we urge the Review Board to reject the conceptual plans for the McMillan Park Reservoir site.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Elizabeth Merritt". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Elizabeth S. Merritt
Deputy General Counsel

cc: Steve Callcott, D.C. Office of Historic Preservation