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October 9, 2015

VIA EMAIL

Mr. Marc Bleyer, Project Manager
Office of the Deputy Mayor for Planning and Economic Development
The John A. Wilson Building
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW, Suite 317
Washington, DC 20004

RE: 1000 4th Street, SW; Square 0542, Lot 0822, Waterfront Station Parcel
Dear Mr. Bleyer,

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the three finalists' bids for redevelopment of the North Building site of Waterfront Station, in response to RFP No. DCEB-2015-R-5001.

The stated mission of the SW/Near Southeast Community Benefits Coordinating Council (CBCC) is "...to ensure that ANC 6D redevelopment sustains neighborhood diversity and improve residents' quality of life." CBCC was established to ensure that redevelopment supports and enhances our unique character, reiterated in the Southwest Small Area Plan, to the benefit of both its current residents and those who will now seek it out as a place to live and work.

Our comments here are not to choose one bid as best, but to address components of each that incorporate essential principles that would reflect the objective of maintaining diversity and quality of life for our community and that you might incorporate as you negotiate for the design of the final plan.

Housing

The three proposals promise between 378 and 443 units and per DC law at least 30% of those units will be below market rate (BMR). But none promise larger than 2 BR units and, as with most new housing in SW, will accommodate singles and couples but few families. The ANC raised this concern in its May 14 letter to the Republic team (the other two bidders do not reference any ANC communication). PN Hoffman claims somewhat more square footage but few details on which to offer comment.

MRP Realty proposes the greatest number of affordable units plus 8 units for permanent supportive housing, demonstrating a commitment to truly mixed income living and additionally addressing some of the crisis in homelessness and others needed a permanently supportive environment. The proposal includes a partnership with a social services provider to ensure that residents receive the services they need. The proposal is sensitive to the culture and ethos of this community and to the needs of the City as gentrification and redevelopment proceeds; if MRP is not the winning bid, DMPED might consider that the component be added to the winning design.

Republic has only 378 units but includes 18 duplex townhouses. Most new development will dramatically increase density in Southwest, and no townhouses or low-rise structures have recently been proposed. The Republic duplexes, at up to 1100 sq. ft, are a welcome addition but are only two bedroom units and it is not clear whether they might accommodate families. Republic explicitly promises the affordable units to be scattered throughout the building; presumably all bidders will do the same but this should be made explicit.

The size of the affordable units, individually and as a total of the required 80,000 sq. ft. requirement, and the duration of affordability are not explicit. There is no discussion of whether offering any units for purchase was considered. Including a for-sale component in the plans, even if it is a small component would increase the diversity of housing on this our “main street.” Further, the combined effect of small units offered predominantly or exclusively for rental can impact neighborhood stability over time and should be considered by DMPED as it procures redevelopment strategies going forward.

Retail

The site is intended to include ground floor “community-serving retail or municipal services.” DMPED must determine from all bidders the precise profile of retail and rent levels (and mechanisms to hold rents affordable over time to support neighborhood businesses), since this new neighborhood “main street” will provide the principal access to walkable services for neighborhood residents.

MRP suggests neighborhood-serving retail might include a hardware, bank, and arts space. Republic shows four small store spaces on 4th Street, perhaps smaller total sq. footage than MRP, but mentions yoga studio, pet store, hardware, and plants/flowers/gift shop as options, responsive to the repeated requests of the community for neighborhood-level services in its town center. PN Hoffman’s two large retail blocks, the most (22,500 sq ft.) of retail space, provides little detail on street frontage or content (e.g., whether large stores or for other uses). The heavy promotion of the black box theater, perhaps a tax advantage, would complement Southwest’s role as a cultural hub. But as the presenters noted, they will have a hardware store on the Wharf. The neighborhood needs neighborhood services on this main street and entertainment spaces that will draw large numbers of visitors to areas that can better accommodate them. The response suggests an inversion of that purpose; the local theater company, and concomitant cultural activities is an attractive amenity but may come at the expense of neighborhood common space and neighborhood level retail and services.

Public Spaces

The community has continually pressed for preserving open space—for neighborhood character, and common spaces—to promote civil interaction. Republic is the only bidder that has referenced an intention to use its interior common area as a public space for some community programming. The other two bids have restricted common spaces primarily to building residents. Republic is the only proposer that has referenced the existing design of 1960s development, which includes high-rise, low-rise and open space. Whether its duplexes are actually

townhouses, which could reduce some of the massing effect of the building, or whether they are simply the lower level of the 11-story structure, is not clear and should be addressed explicitly. Other than general references to lively street activity and some idealized visual reference to sidewalk cafes, there is no indication in any of the bids about setbacks or realistic spacing for sidewalk use. Since 4th Street will be dominated by 11-story (or higher) structures, details for open common spaces should be carefully examined in all bids. Hoffman mentions restaurant outdoor seating on the private side street.

The loss of common space in combination with buildings that are 11-story blocks with little to no setback or other conservation of open space, does not serve the Small Area Plan recommendations for varied building lines and controlled massing to preserve both the neighborhood character and feeling of open space. The building façade in the Republic proposal includes balconies, not apparent in the other bids, which enhances its residential effect. DMPED may view the last four sites of Waterfront Station as separate and discrete from other development to come and therefore the massing issue is not a serious concern. We hope, however, that DMPED does not allow this massing to set a precedent for future development designs.

Other Issues

For all bidders, relationships with other service providers that will make training, job placement and retention a reality for SW and other DC residents who are underemployed or have difficulty maintaining employment is an extremely important component. The connections are essential for permanent supportive housing but equally important if training and hiring promises are to become a reality and DC and SW hires stay employed over the long term. DMPED should extract detail on these relationships to ensure that outreach, mentoring and other services make hiring local residents a real and sustainable objective. This has been done in other developments (e.g., Hyatt Place and DC Central Kitchen).

The Republic proposal promises 40 permanent jobs and a relationship with the Office of Apprenticeship Programs and DC Apprenticeship Council to provide training and employment to neighborhood residents. MRP includes a partnership with Housing Opportunities Unlimited (HOU), which itself brings several other partnerships for a broad array of related services. It is not clear whether HOU is intended primarily for the permanent supportive housing component or more broadly to support other commitments for training and hiring in construction and beyond. Hoffman is silent on the issue and includes no such partnerships.

Parking for retail access is a worsening problem for neighborhood residents. None of the proposals address the issue. Republic includes 258 parking spaces, which if dedicated to the 378 renters would be a high ratio of residents to spaces, and would potentially support desirable demographic diversity without requiring residential street parking permits, which the ANC has discouraged. The number and allocation of parking spaces for each of the bidders needs to be clarified so that some car ownership that would support diversity is accommodated but does not compete with scarce street parking.



Republic promises some of its side street parking, on the now private street (the original K Street), will be reserved for Sunday churchgoers. That space could also be provided to short-term retail customers Monday thru Saturday. DMPED needs to address this with its finalists and the winning bidder. Hoffman might promise some of its off-street parking to this use as well (or some of that space if the theater moves to the Wharf or other space).

In sum, it will be critical, in our view, that the primary purpose of whoever is chosen is to create the true neighborhood-level main street the Southwest community has been waiting for decades to see, and housing that serves and preserves our unique social diversity, and that the plan is careful not to overwhelm these purposes with other objectives.

We thank you sincerely for offering the community an opportunity to exchange views directly with the bidders at an open meeting and for this second opportunity to put our comments and suggestions in writing for you to consider as you finalize this plan. We look forward to continued dialogue as redevelopment moves forward.

On behalf of the CBCC Board, and most sincerely,

/s/Ken LaCruise,
Chair

/s/ Fredrica D. Kramer
Vice Chair