

# **BEFORE THE NATIONAL CAPITAL PLANNING COMMISSION**

## **Proposed Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital: District Elements – Comprehensive Plan Amendment Act of 2010**

File No. CP-19

### **Statement of Drury Tallant January 6, 2011**

My name is Drury Tallant. I reside at 732 Third Street, NE near the eastern edge of the H Street Bridge. There is one row house closer to the H Street Bridge than my residence. My immediate neighborhood has seen many large projects proposed or constructed in recent years. I have actively supported and worked with developers and the Office of Planning in gaining approvals for nearby projects including Jim Abdo's Senate Square; Guy Stuart's 360° H Street; and Dreyfus Property Group's Capitol Place. In each of those projects the community ultimately supported the developers' requests for substantial zoning relief because the net benefits to both the District and to our neighborhood were apparent and were embodied within a proposed design. The proposed amendment to the Comprehensive Plan would fundamentally alter how a project at the Union Station North site would be proposed, reviewed and approved. The proposed amendment would enable a rezoning of the large air rights parcels, significantly increasing the potential building envelope.

Because no actual building has been proposed, we have scant abstractions of where some buildings might appear from very selective vantage points. Further, those depictions tend to distort the differences between the proposed zoning envelope and nearby buildings. For example, the section/elevations for Union Station North show a dashed line 130 feet above the top of the bridge, while the nearby buildings – whether existing or proposed – are shown with their substantial penthouses. This significantly reduces the apparent increase of the proposed height relative to nearby structures. Further, the selection of perspectives from eye level fail to capture the effect of the proposal from less flattering but far more important vantage points such as the US Capitol Grounds. This project would be nearly as high above Station Place or Senate Square as those projects are above the top of the H Street Bridge. If approved, a building of the proposed height would be visible to every visitor arriving at Reagan National Airport, altering the view of the US Capitol dome.

I submit for your consideration five drawings prepared on behalf of the Capitol Hill Restoration Society and the Committee of 100 on the Federal City. These illustrations depict the building envelope if the proposed Amendment of the Comprehensive Plan, reinterpretation of 1910 Height Act, and Union Station North Zoning are approved.

View 1 is taken near the northeast corner of the Capitol, at the head of Delaware Avenue. This axial view of Union Station shows how dramatically the profile of Union Station's iconic barrel vault would be altered.

View 2, Delaware Avenue at D Street, NE is near the midpoint between the Capitol and Union Station. As you can see, the balanced composition of Union Station is again substantially altered. Note also the height of the nearby buildings. The Postal Building to the west; and Station Place and the Thurgood Marshall buildings have building heights that respect the significant views of the Union Station.

View 3 is taken from Louisiana Avenue at D Street. This is the principal avenue for vehicular traffic as well as pedestrians heading toward Union Station from the National Mall. Once again, you can clearly see that the proposal would diminish the profile of Union Station.

View 4 is taken from Senate Park along the North Capitol right of way. As in Views 1 through 3, you can see that the silhouette and contour of Union Station would be lost. These views are of great significance to the many thousands of residents and visitors who travel between the Capitol precinct and Union Station.

The final drawing, View 5, depicts the proposed height of the Union Station North zoning relative to both Union Station and the US Capitol. I think it is clear from these drawings that the proposed Comprehensive Plan Amendment would permit a zoning envelope, reinterpretation of the 1910 Height Act, and selection of a measuring point that would alter these important vistas and the skyline surrounding Washington's most symbolic and historic structures.

The Union Station North development site has the potential for both tremendous good and tremendous harm to the District's urban fabric. It is also a site fraught with complications and complexity. It will not be easy to design or construct any project on this site, and I do not doubt that the developer will require substantial assistance and zoning relief in order to make any proposal a reality. However, I believe our responsibility here today is not to protect the developer's bottom line, but rather a far broader responsibility to protect and enhance the District of Columbia. Thus, the prudent course of action is to place the burden where it belongs and require that developer proffer designs tied to the zoning relief required to make that design a reality. I oppose the Proposed Comprehensive Plan Amendment until a specific design permits an assessment of a concrete proposal.