



**Hearing before the Historic Preservation Review Board
Master Plan for Redevelopment of Walter Reed Army Medical Center Historic District
Testimony Presented by Loretta Neumann
October 29, 2015**

Madam Chair, thank you for the opportunity to testify today on behalf of the Committee of 100 on the proposed master plan for redevelopment of the Walter Reed Army Medical Center Historic District. We participated as a consulting party on the draft programmatic agreement the Army negotiated with the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation and the DC Historic Preservation Office under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act. We also attended numerous meetings concerning the reuse plan and small area plan. We testified on the District's Walter Reed Small Area Plan before the HPRB in 2012 and the DC Council in 2013, and on the Walter Reed Text and Map Amendments before the DC Zoning Commission on the in April 2015.

We have reviewed the materials provided in the application and the staff report by Tim Dennee. Our comments:

- (1) In general, there is **much to praise about the proposed development from a preservation standpoint**, as nearly all the buildings contributing to the historic district will be renovated and reused. The cultural landscape is also largely being preserved. The devil, of course, is in the details, and plans for developing individual historic buildings and sites will need more scrutiny by the HPRB as they are presented. We will be watching them carefully too.
- (2) We agree with the staff report that the **proposed demolition of three contributing historic buildings (31, 38 and 84) is contrary to the purposes of the preservation law**. No evidence has been provided to show, as the law requires, "a plan of building having significant benefits to the District of Columbia or to the community by virtue of exemplary architecture, specific features of land planning, or social or other benefits having a high priority for community services." We do not believe that this requirement can be met simply by stating that demolition could be justified by the demands of the entire campus redevelopment. If that were the case, other historic buildings could face the wrecking ball as well. We **ask HPRB to urge the planners to find ways to incorporate these historic buildings into the new development**.
- (3) We disagree with one part of the staff report; namely, we find **development of some of the new buildings would be out of scale with the surrounding historic buildings and, hence, incompatible with the historic district**. The 85 feet heights proposed for some buildings in the interior and 75 feet heights along Georgia Ave. are much higher than the historic buildings, which are generally less than 50 feet. These heights are also not what the community agreed with the Office of Planning in the small area plan, which was painstakingly organized for development of the site. The only building that surpasses these heights is building #2, which is about 120 feet, but which is not a contributing historic building; hence it should not be used for comparative purposes. Indeed, we know of no buildings in upper Ward 4 that are 75 feet or higher. We therefore **ask HPRB to require lowering the heights to no more than 65 feet - the maximum allowed in this area of upper Ward 4 and more compatible with the Walter Reed Historic District**.
- (4) We agree with the staff report that more information is needed. The **plans do not adequately show the real impact of the new construction**. It is extremely hard to visualize what the height and massing would look like, especially given the undulating topography that makes the impact of height hard to envision in two-dimension. We **ask HPRB to require the developers to present a computer visualization and a three dimensional scale model of these critical areas** so you and the public can see what the impact will be.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify.