



## Community for Creative Non – Violence

January 2, 2003

The Honorable Sharon Ambrose  
Councilmember, District of Columbia  
John Wilson Building  
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20004

Re: 500 New Jersey Avenue, N.W.  
Opposition to Public Space  
Variances

Dear Councilmember Ambrose:

I have just recently learned of troubling activity at 500 New Jersey Avenue, N.W. concerning the National Association of Realtors' (NAR) attempt to **impose an inappropriate building on this important and unique site.**

You are already aware of the history of the Community for Creative Non-Violence (CCNV) and my role as its Executive Director. This role requires me to participate actively in the development of our city - particularly the CCNV neighborhood in which 500 New Jersey is located. In addition, my role as a former Advisory Neighborhood Commissioner in this area has earned me (and CCNV) the right to participate as a major corporate citizen of this area, and as a major agent for constructive social change. These roles place a responsibility on us to involve ourselves in how this area is developed. It also, I believe, equips us with a **high level of responsible insight into what constitutes the public good.**

Over the past several years, first as an ANC Commissioner, then as Executive Director of CCNV, I've met several times with Jay Hellman and discussed options for transforming New Jersey Avenue, N.W. As a result of these consultations an excellent development plan was evolved for this site — one very much in the public interest. This plan was approved unanimously by the BZA on July 24, 2001. It was supported enthusiastically by everyone, including the ANC and CCNV. A critically important aspect was the **relationship of the building to the public realm.**

The previously approved plan included **operable windows, bay windows, and balconies with French doors. These features softened the building and opened it to the surrounding area in creative, significant ways. They created a lively ongoing visual contact between the life in the building and the life out on the street, making for a healthy holistic approach to the flow of neighborhood space.** The sense of ongoing business and activity,

flowing from building to street, created an undoubted sense of enhanced public safety and comfort. It enriched the experience of being a pedestrian on the sidewalk.

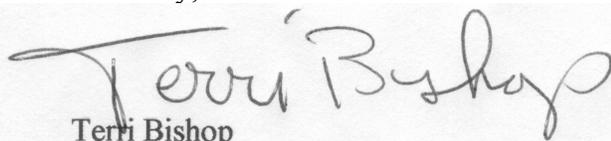
What troubles me about the NAR proposed building: (1) None of the previously approved features is included in the NAR plan; (2) the elimination of these features reduces the value of the building by over \$10,000,000 (according to leading commercial real estate brokers in DC); (3) NAR has not cooperated with the local community (ANC and their own broker-members); and (4) NAR proposes floors that extend beyond the property line and therefore requires a variance from the building code (this variance should be permitted only if **all** aspects of the building strongly serve the public interest without substantial objection from the community).

With the public interest in mind, I strongly oppose the NAR's development plan. This opposition is taken because: (1) It doesn't reasonably maximize the taxable value of the building that is proposed; (2) It doesn't contribute to public safety (even though ways to do so are quite achievable for a development of this type on this site); and (3) **It has been approved by the BZA in the face of concerted opposition from the local ANC (and without the ANC being able to participate formally in the approval process).**

I strongly feel that the city should not allow a clever use of bureaucracy and administrative minutiae to aid and abet an inappropriate action of the type proposed by the NAR. The city cannot be excused from taking a stand against the NAR, even if the NAR's power as a large, wealthy, lobbying organization makes it an unwelcome opponent. The city has an obligation to see that the ANC has proper voice in such a matter and to scrutinize development proposals not only in terms of the narrowest possible criteria but also in terms of the broader public good.

I request your support of my views and those of the ANC and ask you to communicate your support urgently to the DCRA's Acting Administrator, Mr. Denzil Noble, and to the Public Space Committee.

Sincerely,



Terri Bishop  
Executive Director

cc: Denzil Noble, Acting Administrator, DCRA Building & Land Regulation Admin.  
Robert L. Hall, ANC Commissioner, ANC6A  
Ms. Denise Turner, DC Public Space Committee  
Harold Brazil, Councilmember-at-Large, Chair of the DC Economic Dev. Comm.  
David Catania, Councilmember-at-Large  
Carol Schwartz, Councilmember-at-Large  
Phil Mendelsohn, Councilmember-at-Large  
Eric Price, Deputy Mayor for Economic Development