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Subject: Datatel/Wesley Housing

Dear Mayor Donley and Members of Council,

I can't make it to the council meeting tomorrow night so I thought I'd send you my thoughts on a couple of issues:

The first issue is the Datatel building. I am opposed to Rick Gersten's proposal to rehab the building for a number of reasons. At the walk through, it was very clear that, because of the way the building is configured, it would be impossible to have any retail on the street level and the lobby could not be lowered to street level so there would be no positive addition to the streetscape. This is contrary to all the stated goals of the UPW task force. The would-be developers have been making verbal promises to do whatever we want. However, they clearly cannot deliver since the street level retail is not feasible. I'm not willing to put my support behind anyone based on vague promises that clearly can not be fulfilled without any clear proposal for what realistically can be done.

I am also concerned that Rick Gersten's primary interest is in turning around and selling the rehabed building. There are no guarantees that any new investor would be community oriented. Also, it's clear that once the building is renovated, it would be a permanent fixture.

I urge the City to proceed with efforts to buy Datatel and raze it because that might make it possible for an experienced developer to combine the site with other adjacent properties and start realizing the plan outlined in the UPW task force report. Datatel and the adjacent sites don't have to wait for the lease on the Chinese restaurant to expire. I hope you will follow through with your commitment to the UPW plan.

The second issue I want to address is that of the Wesley Housing proposal. Mt. Jefferson is firmly behind Lynhaven in their opposition to the Wesley Housing project for several reasons. First of all, we have quite a bit of section 8 housing in this area and have felt for some time that there should be better distribution among ALL parts of the city. Second, it is actually more helpful to the culturally and economically impoverished to live in close proximity to a mix of people, including some of higher income and educational status. Living in a homogenous, low income area perpetuates the cycle of poverty, lack of goals, education, etc. Let's not create that kind of an area in Lynhaven.

After many years of stagnation, we are beginning to have a good mix of people in UPW, economically and culturally. Our challenge is to continue that trend. We want to avoid over-gentrification that makes housing no longer affordable to middle class folks. However, we also want to prevent many hard working homeowners whose lifetime investment is in their homes from losing the advantages of appreciation which we are finally seeing. I think adding the Wesley Housing project would serve to depress this

neighborhood and halt or reverse the gradually improving trends we've worked to achieve. Last but not least, many of us have been working hard to improve our community and, as you know, we try to work together with developers, not against them. However, it's very difficult to see high end developments like the Reserve and others built by large companies from out of town who take no interest in the surrounding communities and absolve themselves of the responsibility to provide low-income units simply by paying a fee.

Especially when the way that money is used ends up depressing the older surrounding communities that already face a lot of economic and social challenges. I'm afraid such policies may end up creating a situation similar to that in Old Town where several blocks are very upscale and then there is a large area next door where people live in poverty and the two don't connect or mix.

I and the other community leaders in Upper Potomac West see the need for affordable housing and we support it but we want to see a more fair distribution of such housing all around the city. We already have plenty.

I'm sorry this letter has ended up so long but I feel very passionate about both these issues so thank you for your patience.

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