

TESTIMONY BEFORE THE COUNCIL COMMITTEE ON

LIBRARIES, PARKS, AND RECREATION

HARRY THOMAS, JR, CHAIRMAN

ON

THE FY 2008 PERFORMANCE OF THE CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT

PROGRAM FOR THE DC DEPARTMENT OF PARKS AND

RECREATION

TESTIMONY SUBMITTED ON

THURSDAY, MARCH 6, 2008

PRESENTED BY

THE EASTLAND GARDENS CIVIC ASSOCIATION:

MR. GREG RHETT, PRESIDENT

Good morning to the Honorable Committee Chairman Thomas and Councilmembers, Schwartz, Mendelson, Wells, Catania, and other distinguished members of the Council; Thank each of you for all you do in behalf of the city in this important legislative role. I am Greg Rhett, President of the Eastland Gardens Civic Association.

Last year, March of 2007, a panel of fellow residents and I testified before this committee to share I views and wishes on the proposed budget for the Department of Parks and Recreation, specifically related to capital improvement proposals for our Kenilworth-Parkside Recreation Center and its Athletic Fields. We specifically addressed the concerns of our fellow residents those who have a stake in the future of our community. Additionally, we submitted, for the record the individual written testimonies of more than 350 residents who could not make the hearing. Today, I'm here to provide you with follow up and an update on where things stand with the capital improvements funding appropriated and budgeted, by this body, for the Kenilworth-Parkside Recreation Center and Athletic Fields.

Frankly, we have to report that this community is very concerned with the pace of the capital improvement planning process and subsequent results for our Kenilworth-Parkside community recreation center and Athletic Fields. We are very unhappy with the contractor that was hired to guide this community through this new recreation center planning process. We are very unhappy with the lack of a sense of urgency displayed by the contractor, which is direct opposition to the sentiments expressed by this body, the Mayor, and the new DPR Director, Mr. Clark Ray. Many of you may recall that this planning process was supposed to begin in October of 2006. This after specific funding was fought for and won by our then Ward 7 Councilmember, Vincent Gray. Under the leadership of a previous DPR administration (Ms. Kimberly Flowers), nothing happened, and all we received were excuses. Then in 2007, after we had elected a new Mayor who demonstrated a strong understanding of our plight and a sense of urgency about moving this project forward, our hope about finally getting this planning process started was restored. We had several meetings with the Mayor and his aids in the spring of 2007. We witnessed him directing the DPR administration (led by Ms. Wanda Durden) to swiftly take the necessary actions to move forward with the community planning process. Again, we received nothing from DPR but excuses. This time, the Mayor quickly removed the underperforming DPR

administration and appointed a new Director, Mr. Clark Ray, who shared the Mayor's sense of urgency. In the interim, we also elected Councilmember Yvette Alexander who quickly picked up the advocacy and legislative support that Councilmember Gray had started. Under Mr. Ray, a contractor was finally hired and the community planning process began in earnest in October of 2007. This, a full year after this process was originally slated to start! Meanwhile the clock for planning and implementation was steadily ticking..... Our community wasted no time in conveying our vision and wishes for a new center to the newly hired contractor. After a November 2007 community planning meeting with the contractor and DPR representatives, we expected to subsequently be provided with the requisite drawings and budget estimates that could be shared with the Mayor and this body.

We knew that we would realistically need to request additional funding to bring our community vision to fruition. We also knew that we needed to present realistic schematics and cost estimates in order to document and justify our anticipated request for additional funding. We knew that because of the one year delay, we had to move with a sense of urgency.

Sadly, I must report to you today, that after 4 community planning meetings with this contractor, we have nothing to show. The only thing that this contractor has provided is a set of "drawings" that has best been described, by residents who happen to be professional architects and building planners, as 2 steps above "Crayola Crayons." Our resident professionals describe the product submitted by this contractor as something that any respectable firm would never submit to a client.

The only other thing we received from this contractor, since November 2007, was a "\$34M budget estimate" which ridiculously reflected mysterious, inaccurate, inflated costs for a design plan that had completely lost touch with reality, as we know it. And, to top it off, the submitted cost estimates had no discernable relationship to the "Crayola drawings." As a result of this underperforming contractor, we believe that this community has been precariously placed in an untenable position for moving this project forward, and gaining the necessary additional funding to meet the community needs and vision of a new facility.

Consequently, we believe that this contractor should be immediately removed and replaced with a professional firm that can deliver a professional product, in a timely fashion.

Our second capital improvements challenge: As you may recall, in 2005, Sen. Mary L. Landrieu (D-La.), a member of the Senate Appropriations Committee's D.C. subcommittee, uninitiated a federal funding allocation of \$5M to be applied with District matching funds to renovate and build a new football/soccer field with lighted scoreboard, new bleachers, and stadium lights. A new regulation, all weather, six-lane track, and a regulation sized baseball diamond, and repaved basketball courts and parking lot were to be constructed, along with a remodeled concession stand complete with bathrooms and a storage shed. The new baseball field was slated to mainly be used by the Spingarn and H.D. Woodson high school teams. Well, this project is still not completed and now lays dormant. Our outdoor basketball courts are currently unusable, and as a result of the track construction, one of our handball courts has also been rendered unusable.

Again, we have witnessed massive staffing changes/transitions within the responsible DC government entities that were slated to bring this project to fruition. Specifically, DPR was to work in partnership with the DC Sports and Entertainment Commission to bring this project to fruition. Unfortunately, the DCSEC lost then Executive Director, Mr. Allen Lew and Mr. Ray who was the Project Director for this renovation project. Both were appointed to new positions within the new Mayoral administration. Again, we witnessed this project being victimized by underperforming contractors. After meetings with the new DCSEC Executive Director, Mr. Greg O'Dell, we learned that the DCSEC engaged in protracted legal actions in order to get refunds and then try to move forward with completing the plans as agreed. Millions of District and Federal tax dollars have been expended, yet the final product still has not been completed. After much fanfare, and even a Mayoral ribbon cutting ceremony, it appears that this project has simply been abandoned. Apparently, now that they have drained as many tax dollars as they could from these efforts, hired contractors have moved on to more lucrative District contracts.

Today, distinguished ladies and gentlemen, our direct appeal to you is for the necessary capital improvements funds to fulfill both of these long-standing promises to this community. Please remember, the Kenilworth-Parkside Recreation Center and Athletic Fields will ultimately serve

more than 7,000 tax paying District residents. We have been put off, and delayed long enough. Enough is enough! We deserve better.

Thank you for the opportunity to share our thoughts and formally submit this request.

March 6, 2008

Good morning and thank you for the opportunity to address you all.

I have been an Eastland Gardens home owning resident for one year this month. As a first time homeowner I vowed to take pride in my home and my community and that was no hard task after finding the Eastland Gardens Civic Association.

The Association is involved in every aspect of its community and the city - beautification, education, transportation, and, of course, the reason I'm here today – recreation.

In the year that I've been a resident I've joined the Association and its Executive Committee and have been thoroughly impressed with the professionalism that EGCA communicates with its community, the Mayor and particularly DPR, specifically, Mr. Jesse Rounds, Director Clark Ray. We have also been cordial and professional in dealing with the architects for this project, Bell Architects. We have been involved around the clock on the issue of getting a new recreation center.

Precise recommendations, suggestions, and requests have been made by EGCA in the absence of politics, attitudes, sidelining and that's a welcomed rarity. Until now – it seems.

There's been a failure in the last few months to follow through – and not on the part of the community – which could hurt my 3- and 5-year-old children's – and their children's – chances of having safe and updated recreation resources in their neighborhood. I – amongst 7,000 residents of my community – will be sad and burned District residents if we are unable to get through this forest of red tape and not receive the necessary capital improvements funds for this very important project.

Also, please note that this facility is adjacent to our nation's only National Park dedicated to aquatic life – the Aquatic Gardens. Just think, the funds you all provide will further entice national, and international visitors to see the hard work of the District, its dedication to community and youth and environment.

Please, don't forget about us. Please, don't let our hard work and organized efforts be in vain. Please relay this to the architects so we can get moving. Please, find it in your budget to allow us, our children, and grandchildren to have not only a home away from home, but a place where we know our children will be fighting off the odds, statistics and quite simply ... have fun.

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