

From: Kent Cooper [<mailto:w.kent.cooper@verizon.net>]
Sent: Tuesday, October 19, 2010 12:03 PM
To: Gray, Vincent (COUNCIL); Mendelson, Phil (COUNCIL); David Catania
Subject: Air Rights at Union Station

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The Honorable Council Chair and Members
Vincent Gray
Phil Mendelson
David Catania

Re: Air Rights for north of Union Station

Gentlemen:

I am a trustee of the Committee of 100 on the Federal City, and an architect with a long experience in planning and development in our city. I am writing now concerning the impending planning decisions which will be required for the development of the Air Rights Zone to the north of Union Station.

Let me begin by stating that I believe this area ought to be developed. With the Mt Vernon Triangle and the NOMA sectors already under active development, the air rights project could serve to unite what is presently a fragmented area in the city. The key to its development, I believe, is the resolution of building heights considerations. The present proposal to calculate allowable building height on the basis of a starting point at the elevation of east-west streets which would bridge across the zone, at approximately elevation fifty-five feet, or a landscaped deck which would cover the zone at the same general elevation, would produce a virtual wall, or to use a natural geographic term a

“cliff” that would be as disruptive to the skyline of the city as is the present hollowed out zone where no buildings exist. This does not have to happen.

The Comprehensive Plan calls for maximum building heights in the city to be calculated from the highest adjacent ground level. It is this regulation that has given the city a memorable civic character as the nation’s capital. Let’s not tamper with this regulation. Where this produces an economic penalty, let’s offset it by creating new air rights zoning for the area including appropriate height limitations to off-set the height penalty that the air rights produces, and with real estate tax incentives to make the area economically attractive.

The thing that must not be allowed to happen is that this air rights zone becomes a development bonanza through the amendment to the Height Limitations that govern the rest of the city.

Sincerely,
signed/

W. Kent Cooper FAIA