

**TESTIMONY ON  
THE FLEA MARKET AT EASTERN MARKET  
AS A USE OF SPECIAL VALUE**

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On behalf of Diverse Markets Management, LLC

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Based on my experience as a practitioner of place-making, or the development of great public spaces from cultural sites, I focus my testimony on the importance of the Flea Market at Eastern Market as a use of special value to both Capitol Hill and the District of Columbia as a whole. This testimony is submitted in response to the failure of the applicant's proposal to make adequate provision for the Flea Market at Eastern Market, and recommends the proposal as submitted be modified to permit the District of Columbia and Capitol Hill to continue the social and cultural benefits derived from the Flea Market at Eastern Market.

The Flea Market at Eastern Market is a use of special value to both Capitol Hill and the District of Columbia as a whole. It is an essential part of the cultural reawakening of the Eastern Market district; it provides special synergies to the life of the neighborhood and the city. The Eastern Market with its Flea Market as its sparkplug is a national model of how you bring vitality and dimension to a historic site to create a great public space – a place that works as historic preservation, works as a tourism destination, works as the heart of a neighborhood, and works as a model of urban enhancement for the rest of the city.

The continued robust life of the Flea Market is essential for the Hine redevelopment project to achieve the goals of the District of Columbia for this project. The Flea Market is recognized by neighbors and visitors as the heart of the Eastern Market district, linking the indoor activities of the Eastern Market by connecting it with life on the street, with local retail outlets, with neighbors and with visitors and shoppers who come distances for the festive experience when they walk through this neighborhood on a weekend. The value of the Flea Market was made unforgettable during the days after the Eastern Market fire in 2007, when the Flea Market proved its effectiveness as a sustaining engine of the liveliness of the neighborhood.

All this observation is reinforced by multiple articles, over a sustained period of time, in the local and national Media, cited in References, Attached to this testimony.

—The Flea Market at Eastern Market was voted to be the “second best flea market in the world” by a September 2010 Huffington Post poll.

—The District of Columbia's own Cultural Tourism DC web site “Insider's Guide” (January 2012) of ALL Washington attractions, the Eastern Market – Flea Market was ranked number 3 overall, demonstrating both the essential linkage of the Flea Market and Eastern Market and the value of the flea market to notable professionals.

—The Guide to the Best Flea Markets (June 2000) described this Flea Market as “A real, old-fashioned neighborhood market in the middle of our nation's capital. International atmosphere with vendors from five continents. Aggressive advertising in the Washington Post and nationally circulated antiques journals.”

Tourism literature that encourages new activities and new reasons to spend more time in the District of Columbia are particularly valuable both in attracting new revenue and in broadening the identity of Washington as a city of neighborhoods as well as monuments.

—AirTran's in-flight magazine assessed the Flea Market this way: The weekend flea markets “draw some of Washington's largest crowds outside of the National Mall and museums. . . . Every weekend, Washingtonians-in-the-know head to the Eastern Market's historic food hall and nearby grounds to enjoy the sights, sounds, and smells of the bustling food, arts and flea

markets. While most tourists stick to the districts shopping mainstays, these unique vendors provide some of DC's best shopping experiences." This tourism article goes on to make the point that both visitors and vendors are from "everywhere" and lists Flea Market products from furniture to prints to silk scarves to vintage clothing to art deco and nouveau art pieces to African masks. ('LORD OF THE FLEAS: The Eastern Market in Washington, DC is a world away from your average shopping mall.' Keith Stanley, Air Tran Magazine. February 2005.)

—The Flea Market was cited by Art and Antiques Magazine in their August 1989 article: "D.C. — Jewel of an Antique Setting."

—The Flea Market Guide from Bargain Quest Magazine, February 2006, saying "you can't argue with history," says that the Flea Market at Eastern Market "is one of the nation's premier examples of all that is great about open-air markets."

—A PBS/WQED video, 'A Flea Market Documentary' (2000), focused on the significance of the Flea Market phenomenon, and again highlighted the Flea Market at Eastern Market.

—'The flea market of Eastern Market has one of the most diverse markets in the nation. It hosts up to 100 exhibitors from five continents. The market participates in a host of holiday and seasonal events to attract visitors, award prizes and offer certificates and include those who live in the area into the community' (Wikipedia, June 10, 2012).

—'The antique show and flea market held at Eastern market on Capitol Hill is a weekly success story.' "International flavor adds spice to antiques at Eastern Market." The Washington Post. June 5, 1989.

Many articles in local media emphasize the added value the Flea Market brings to the Eastern Market, to the neighborhood and to shoppers. The attraction to shoppers should not be diminished; it brings people into the city to buy, permits local people to walk or take the Metro to bargains, and adds to the character and diversity of the neighborhood and the city.

'On weekends the [Eastern] market area comes alive [emphasis added] with farmers bringing in fresh produce, craft and flower vendors, artists, a flea market and street musicians,' (Capital Community News MCDC May 2012).

—The Washington Times ("Queen of Bargains: Itching to visit a flea market?" Jill Kamp, The Washington Times. September 2, 2000) said ' . . . add the Eastern Market Flea market to your itinerary. . . flea market vendors had many displays that spilled out onto the sidewalk and the schoolyard across the street. You can have an al fresco brunch, window shop and perhaps buy some great treasures in this historic market. . . I was impressed by the condition of the pieces and the prices. Furniture seemed to be at least 20 percent less than similar offerings across town.'

—A May 6, 2005 article in the Washington Post emphasized the 'the colorful, exotic wares at the internationally flavored Flea Market at Eastern Market. . .African art proves a popular draw. . .Vendors such as Moses Camara specialize in selling hand-carved pieces from their homelands.'

—Most articles make the special point of the festive experience and the synergy of the Eastern Market food experience and the Flea Market diverse shopping: ‘For a festive Sunday of flea market finds as well as contemporary crafts and art, head to the historic Eastern Market on Capitol Hill. . . You’re likely to see browsers of all ages, ethnicities and backgrounds strolling through 175 booths. . . Goldner has set up at most of Washington’s markets, but there’s something about the Eastern Market. “It’s fun, and you can get a pretty good crab cake sandwich,” she says’ (“FABULOUS FLEA FINDS.” Washington Flyer Magazine. March 1990).

—But throughout these analyses by local media is the sense that something important to the experience of the City is happening with the extra dimension of the Flea Market; the pride shows through: ‘Then there’s Eastern Market – the gem of our neighborhood. While the original 1873 building is being rebuilt after a crippling fire two years ago (this in 2009), the temporary premises is keeping our beloved market merchants in business. And never a weekend goes by that new people don’t find their way to the delights of the farmers’ line, the antique and bargain-filled flea-market and the staggering array of high-quality art, craft and clothing stalls’ ( “This Place We Call Home—Capitol Hill” Maggie Hall. The Hill Rag. February 2009).

—And a year earlier: ‘Sure, it would be nice to go holiday shopping in Europe, but it’d be a tad expensive these days. No worries. We have a European marketplace right here on our Hill every Saturday and Sunday. Why, a Hillaholic such as yourself can stroll right down Seventh Street and find a glorious mixture of arts, crafts, antiques, clothing, textiles and many other curiosities. No Europe, but also, no hideous exchange rates or lost luggage!’ (the Hill Rag December 2008).

— In “To Market, To Market – Flee the malls in favor of open air shopping.” DC Style Magazine August 2005 (Capital File Magazine), this article made the widely cited point that "Congressmen, lawyers, lobbyists, ambassadors, socialites and celebrities mingle among the tablebrowsing masses. Vendors come from all corners of the globe; most are truly skilled artisans and salesmen.. . The market has been featured in mainstream Hollywood movies, on public television documentaries and in countless publications from the area and around the country.. ."

—Beyond the issues of sense of place and neighborhood, the Washington Post (“Flea Market Opens Doors to Retailing; Fledging Entrepreneurs Get a Chance to Test Skills,” September 17, 2001) emphasizes the value to the neighborhood and the District of Columbia of the training for new merchants, highlighting a list success stories of new entrepreneurs “following in the footsteps of many other merchants who got their start in the playground behind Hines Junior High School. . . .the Eastern Market Flea Market also has become a successful, informal incubator for small business.”

What are the components that make the Flea Market so important to the success of Capitol Hill?

As we all know, but somehow sometimes seem to forget the obvious, it is the vitality of people plus a great space with the sense of character, Meaning and continuity that brings historic sites and neighborhoods to life. There is a difference between “dead space” and the “place” of cultural sites. Place is Public Space, Living Space. Exciting public programming of historic squares and plazas is what brings them to life. What a layered and rich sense of celebration can be created by a critical diversity of activity: arts, color, food, music, discovery. In my experience,

the National Park Service has learned that no one thing is by itself a sufficient Destination to bring visitors. Instead we learned you still need the shopping, performance, the events to bring space as a Destination alive. Tourism is an assemblage of opportunities. Today, if not always, structures alone are sterile if there is nothing to buy, or if there is no sense of celebration, and if there are not people to see and be with.

Right here in D.C. Eastern Market district is the textbook example of the right way to create rich urban public space. Capitol Hill, the Eastern Market, the Flea Market, the Eastern Market Metro stop, all work together to expand retail life in the vicinity and the people from near and far, all in the life of an historic neighborhood – everyone knows the elements.

Here in DC we have the Flea Market as the great connector, linkage to the city. It draws you to other great things to see and do. The Flea Market does not compete with the local retail, it is a magnet bringing people to the local stores and the linkage between the Eastern Market itself and neighborhood. National studies funded by the Ford Foundation reveal that the greatest attraction of flea markets to shoppers is the fun of being with people. Without essential changes, this electricity would be lost in the applicant's proposal.

The project as proposed would shrink the space to provide for as little as 1/3 the level of activity you have today. It is axiomatic that when creating great public spaces you build from the strength of your existing assets: use it, don't drain it to move to the next level. The Flea Market evolved to the place it is almost as a natural process, driven by the energy of the vendors, the energy of the public and the entrepreneurial attention and care of the managers. This too is the ideal way for these things to become rooted in the community.

How space is used is an important part of the cultural and social experience. The District has allowed the Flea Market to assume an ideal configuration, just the right amount of room, with up to 150 vendors enough diversity to attract a wide and exciting audience of all kinds of people. This excitement is the historic significance of urban markets, an experience that is documented to go back thousands of years. This does not and could not happen in a Market building alone. The Flea Market with the activities it sponsors injects the entertainment, the sense of joy in urban living that cannot be experienced in a suburban mall or even urban retail streetscape. With the encouragement of the Zoning Commission, a Hine redevelopment could be animated by the synergy of the Flea Market. People choosing to live at Hine will quickly become part of the neighborhood, not walled off. New residents choose to live here because they are drawn by the life of the city; ironically the project as proposed would be deprived of the great sense of celebration of the city.

It is troubling the applicant has provided no evidence of any feasibility studies conducted to determine the optimal public experience measured against the size and carrying capacity of the space allotted to the Flea Market. The space currently allocated to the weekend flea market by the developer would crowd the public into narrower shopping lanes. It would drastically withdraw the number of vendors and stalls. With real-world testing, today's Flea Market is working; 150 stalls and 11,000 people on a typical Sunday are enjoying one of the most historic neighborhoods of our Nation. The proposal's drastic reduction of space and experience in this carefully tuned sense of place risks losing what makes this neighborhood festive and special. You risk losing the critical mass needed to attract the range of shoppers and vendors that make this place an exciting urban Destination. It is short sighted of the applicant not to have looked to

the long term benefit of the new Hine residents and the value to this project of nurturing this great public space.

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An Attachment to the Testimony of James Pepper, of 2219 California Street, NW; Apartment 33, Washington, DC 20008, before the District of Columbia Zoning Commission, Regarding Zoning Commission Case No.11-24.

Bibliography, Journalism and Other Public Evidence Describing the Synergy of the Flea Market at Eastern Market to Capitol Hill and Washington, DC.

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"America's Health Threat, Poor Urban Design." Scott Carlson, Chronicle for Higher Education, January 11, 2012.

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