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KALORAMA CITIZENS ASSOCIATION, ADAMS MORGAN FOR REASONABLE DEVELOPMENT SUE TO HALT DESTRUCTION OF ADAMS MORGAN’S “PUBLIC SQUARE”

The Kalorama Citizens Association and Adams Morgan for Reasonable Development today asked the Superior Court of the District of Columbia to halt the destruction of the publicly used plaza at 18th Street and Columbia Road NW, the heart of the Adams Morgan neighborhood.

The groups argue that developer PN Hoffman cannot build luxury condominiums on the plaza portion of the site, because the public has for almost 40 years enjoyed an easement given to it by the plaza’s original developer, Perpetual Federal Savings & Loan Association.

“Destroying the public Plaza by building a private structure in its place is the textbook example of irreparable harm,” attorney Paul Zukerberg told the court in a written filing. “Hundreds of civic, cultural, musical, and community events have been held on the Plaza, and it is continually in use as a public square and meeting place.” The lawsuit seeks an emergency ruling in the form of a preliminary injunction to halt plans to raze the existing bank building and associated plaza.

Today, the 2,500-square-foot plaza and an adjoining 1,500-square-foot elevated stage are used for a weekly farmers market, musical performances on Adams Morgan Day, and other community gatherings. It sits at the geographic center of Adams Morgan. There are no comparable spaces for public use in the densely-built neighborhood. If the lawsuit is successful, it will not preclude the property owner from developing the portion of the site that is not occupied by the existing plaza.

Adams Morgan activists in 1976 opposed Perpetual’s plans to build a branch at the site because of the bank’s discriminatory lending practices and because the lot had long been used by community vendors. In an historic effort, neighborhood groups took their case to the Federal Home Loan Bank Board in Atlanta, which had to approve the bank’s plan to open a new branch on the site. The groups dropped their opposition only after Perpetual agreed to change its lending practices and to build and dedicate a plaza for public use.

In today’s court filing, the neighborhood organizations state that “the loss of the social, cultural, nutritional, and economic benefits of the public Plaza” would cause them “irreparable harm.” They note that the Adams Morgan Advisory Neighborhood Commission, which cannot engage in lawsuits, also opposes the project.

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