



450 Shurs Lane ~ Philadelphia, PA 19128 ~ 215-508-4343
fmc@manayunkcanal.org ~ www.manayunkcanal.org

Friends of the Manayunk Canal Position Statement VENICE ONE DEVELOPMENT

October 4, 2007

Friends of the Manayunk Canal has reviewed the Venice One development proposal plans. The applicant is proposing to build on a roughly 4.45 acre parcel located on Venice Island between Leverington Avenue and Green Lane. We are forwarding this letter as a statement of the reasons for which we object to this development as it is currently proposed.

- **Flood Protection Measures: Flood protection measures need to be further enhanced to address education, evacuation drills and the limited access onto and off of the island.**

Although Friends of the Manayunk Canal believes that the most responsible choice would be not to develop within the floodplain at all, we do recognize the various safety measures included as part of this plan, including:

- The emergency flood egress route
- The flood resistant construction of the buildings
- The flood evacuation plan
- The emergency alarm and speaker system to communicate with residents
- Association bylaws requiring a clause for evacuation in the event of a flood
- All residential uses being lifted above the base flood elevation

However, we feel that additional safety measures are needed. First, it is critical that part of the flood evacuation plan or association bylaws by homeowner education regarding the dangers of floods. If people are not educated about what the evacuation plans are, they will not work successfully in the high stress environment of a true emergency. A requirement of the homeowner's association should be to hold regular classes informing residents of what to do in an emergency as well as even holding periodic evacuation drills. The emergency flood egress route also needs to be connected at a higher level to a pedestrian bridge that could safely deliver residents from their condos to high ground on foot. The intensity and frequency of floods that have historically occurred on Venice Island supports the need for pedestrian evacuation methods. Evacuation routes should not solely rely on the Leverington Bridge for access off of the island. If the Leverington Bridge were to be overtopped or collapse during a flood event, residents would be left stranded, according to the current plan. Furthermore, for those attempting to evacuate in a vehicle, the already congested intersection of Leverington Avenue and Main Street needs to be addressed to insure that all are able to safely evacuate the island as quickly as possible.

- **Public Access: The Manayunk Canal and the Schuylkill River are public amenities which should be highlighted by this development, not blocked by a 1000 foot long stretch of buildings.**

It is noted on the plan that there is a riverfront public access trail proposed. This trail needs to be connected to more than Green Lane or the trail will be rendered virtually private as the general public

will be unlikely to use a trail that ends on Venice Island under the Green Lane bridge at a staircase. Multiple publicly accessible connections should be considered, including Green Lane Bridge via stairs, a full loop trail that would run around the entire development and connect into the existing Towpath trail via the Leverington Street bridge and new pedestrian bridges connecting the Towpath and Venice Island. The viewsheds and access created by new pedestrian bridges could then be carried through the development out to the Schuylkill River, creating the kind of public access that is appropriate for this area.

- **Height: Allowing the proposed building height of 90 feet will negatively impact the iconic viewsheds along the Manayunk Canal and the Schuylkill River and also challenge the historic qualities and pedestrian environment the community has worked so hard to protect and maintain.**

The proposed building height for this development, at 89 feet tall, is unacceptable. This proposed height would be a 62% increase over the maximum height permitted by zoning of 55 feet. At 89 feet, these buildings would stand taller than the adjacent Venice Lofts development (already at 69 feet tall) and would dominate the Green Lane Bridge which is only 25 feet tall. Additionally, the proposed buildings would become a backdrop to the view of the Manayunk concrete arch railroad bridge from one direction and in the other would obscure or block the view of the bridge entirely as the bridge itself is only 70-75 feet tall. This bridge, built in the early 20th century, has become a symbol for Main Street Manayunk as well as the historic Manayunk Canal.



Furthermore, because this property is adjacent to the Main Street Manayunk Special District Controls area, an area intended to preserve the historic character of Main Street, the proposed building height threatens the pedestrian friendly environment that has helped to make our Main Street a vibrant, economically viable place. It is the recommendation of Friends of the Manayunk Canal that the building heights for this building not be allowed to exceed the maximum height permitted in this zoning district of 55 feet.

It should be noted that these buildings are being proposed above the required elevations under floodway regulations, as a result of the fact that so much of the site is being developed that there would otherwise be no way for emergency vehicles to access the development. A tighter design that conserves more open space and requires less paving would allow for height decreases.

Furthermore, at the proposed height, these buildings will have large open areas beneath them that are an eyesore for those at the pedestrian level. With nearly 20 feet of space beneath the first floor of a residence and the ground, there is no way to mitigate the negative visual impact of this space.

- **Impervious surface cover: Because the parcel proposed for this development is largely a vacant, vegetated parcel within not only the floodplain, but the floodway, Friends of the Manayunk Canal strongly objects to covering the site with 71% impervious surface.**

Not only is the permeability of this land important to the flood protection and mitigation for surrounding areas, paving the majority of the visible land surrounding the buildings treats the area less like the urban environment it is and more like a strip mall. Residents should have access to more than just parking at grade, including but not limited to green space.

- **Gross Floor Area: The proposed gross floor area consumes well beyond the 135% of gross floor area permitted under current zoning and suggests that density (and profits) are taking precedent over all else.**

While it remains to be seen if there is even a market for the type of luxury condos being proposed here, the quality that will be provided by this design is questionable. The density and proximity of the buildings in addition to the large amount of one bedroom condos being proposed suggest that quantity is the driving factor behind this design and not quality. The number of one bedroom apartments should be reduced to allow for issues including height, impervious surface and design to be more adequately addressed.

- **Design: The building facades should be redesigned to fall more in line with the historic character of the area as well as the scale of the surrounding buildings.**

The monotype exterior, shape, height, orientations of the proposed buildings creates an environment that is out of synch with not only the unique and historic nature of the surrounding development, but the massive scale at which it is proposed threatens the very aspects that make our area attractive to live in and visit. Remedies to address this myopic design that clashes with the character of the area include:

- variations in building heights
- incorporating masonry construction as part of the exterior façade to break up the monotony
- attempting to disguise the raised area below the building
- varying the exterior designs and amenities, including bay windows, balconies, etc, to break up the 1000 foot long wall flat fronted buildings

Friends of the Manayunk Canal recommends that approval of the applicant's plan be withheld until all outstanding concerns identified above are resolved with the community.

Sincerely,

Nicole Galdieri, President
Friends of the Manayunk Canal
215-508-4343
fmc@manayunkcanal.org

c: Carol Campbell, Councilwoman
Paul Curran, Philadelphia Planning Commission