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March 15, 2004

Councilmember Cynthia Willard-Lewis
City Hall, Room 2W60
1300 Perdido Street
New Orleans, LA 70112

Re: The effects of street construction on access to essential services for disabled people

Dear Councilmember Willard Lewis:

In my letter to you dated March 14, 2004 I described the plight of a severely disabled patient in your district who could no longer obtain groceries, medication, transportation services to the doctor, and even garbage disposal services as a direct result of street construction in front of her house, which has been going on since October 2003. This represents a danger to the health, safety and welfare of this citizen and relates to all other major construction projects in the heart of our small neighborhood streets throughout New Orleans.

Recently, a developer asked for an illegal spot zoning change in order to build a 14-story high-rise building only 21 feet away from its one- and two-story neighbors at Short Street and Leake Avenue in the Riverbend area of Uptown New Orleans. The construction period to build a 14-story, 9-story, or 7-story high-rise would take two years and would necessitate the closing of our small neighborhood streets because of the heavy machinery and equipment, which must be used at the building site.

Four streets surround this proposed project. Leake Avenue and Huso Streets are only 21 feet in width, Pearl Street is 23 feet, and Short Street is 33 feet across. One of our neighbors, who has been living on Short Street directly across from the proposed project for over 20 years, is permanently physically disabled. When our Councilman, Jay Batt, visited our neighborhood she stated, "If they build that building I won't be able to go out of my house for two years."

Because Short Street is the largest street surrounding the building site, it will probably be closed off for part of the two year period it would take to build this structure.

Our neighbor will be unable to use her cane to safely walk across her broken street and across her broken sidewalk. Also, she will be unable to park her car in her present location next to her home on Short Street. Therefore, our disabled neighbor will be severely impacted for the two year period it would take to build this structure. The construction of this building would harm the health, safety and welfare of this neighbor. This would severely limit her Instrumental Activities of Daily Living and would violate the American with Disabilities Act.

When this proposed zoning change to build a high-rise building on Short Street comes before you at the City Council meeting, I urge you to consider the serious consequences to the health, safety and welfare of all of our local neighbors, including those who have significant disabilities. Similar to the patient I described in your district, any enormous construction project in the heart of our century-old streets and neighborhoods may harm many of our disabled citizens. I urge you to please vote to deny this illegal spot zone and not allow this inappropriate high-rise building to be built in our neighborhood.

Thank you.

Sincerely yours,

Sheldon Hersh, MD

Cc: All City Councilmembers
Mayor Nagin