

**Field Hearing at 49 L Street SE GSA Warehouse Building
House Subcommittee on Government Operations**

**The Honorable Tommy Wells
Councilmember, Ward 6
Council of the District of Columbia**

April 25, 2013

Chairman Mica, Ranking Member Connolly, Congresswoman Norton and Members of the Subcommittee on Government Operations, I am DC Councilmember Tommy Wells. Ward 6 is the largest Ward in the city and the only one that touches all 4 quadrants. It stretches from the Shaw & Mt. Vernon Square neighborhoods in northwest, through the H Street corridor in northeast, along the Anacostia River in southeast, and includes the Capitol Riverfront and Southwest Waterfront.

As you can see from your arrival at today's hearing, the warehouse at 49 L Street, SE is in the middle of a neighborhood undergoing immense change and development. With the highly successful Capitol Riverfront Business Improvement District, as well as creative partnerships with city planners, private developers, business owners, and citizen leadership, this is a neighborhood that has one of the District's fastest residential growth rates and is poised for even greater progress in the next few years. However, this warehouse is vacant and not a contributing asset to the neighborhood. I appreciate the work of our GSA partners and this committee to explore ways to return this building to productive use.

The federal and District governments have a long and successful partnership of working together – often with the leadership from our own Congresswoman

Norton – to turn unused federal properties and parcels into economic catalysts and neighborhood amenities. You can look at any number of success stories – from large scale site transfers such as the Southeast Federal Center and pending Walter Reed campus, to specific properties such as the Old Naval Hospital on Capitol Hill, the impressive Hotel Monaco downtown, and the current West Heating Facility. All have, or are in the process of, creating economic opportunities out of underused federal facilities and returning them to productive use for the city and surrounding community.

Much like this committee's work last year in spurring action on the West Heating Facility, I am hopeful that we will soon see an active plan emerge for this federal warehouse. Indicative of the new energy developing in the neighborhood, neighbors have worked together to outline a proposal for a creative reuse of this particular building – known as the Half Street Market initiative. The overarching goal is to create an asset that will serve both the Capitol Riverfront neighborhood and the entire District. I strongly support the community vision captured in the Half Street Market plan.

Within the Capitol Riverfront neighborhood, we are building the equivalent of a small city – with tens of thousands of residents. Great cities and great neighborhoods have distinctive places and community spaces. You could ask for no better example of that than Yards Park on the riverfront just a few blocks away. Among other great spaces are public markets that activate a streetscape and the blocks around it, and serve a neighborhood with fresh food and places to gather as a community.

The Half Street Market proposal seeks to create a vibrant public market and

restaurant that would operate a workforce development and education program for D.C. residents, host community education programming, and provide a commercial kitchen incubator with access to small business formation resources for culinary entrepreneurs.

This initiative warrants support – whether as proposed or adapted to market conditions that preserve the central elements of the community’s vision – and holds the possibility to transform the vacant building into an iconic project and important community amenity in the Capitol Riverfront neighborhood.

Again, I appreciate the work of this committee and the opportunity to testify at today’s hearing. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.