

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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a local union of **VEA**

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The Richmond Education Association Opposes the Navy Hill Proposal

Richmond, VA: After taking considerable time to thoroughly educate ourselves, our Union has come to the conclusion that the Navy Hill project would harm school funding; present a significant financial risk to our city as a whole; and deprive RPS families of housing. As such, the Richmond Education Association unequivocally opposes the Navy Hill Proposal

Regarding school funding, case studies show that TIFs reduce both local and state funding for education. Locally, RPS is poised to lose 30 years or more of inflation on property taxes in the TIF, as well as revenue from new properties that would be built downtown over the next three decades, including the second Dominion tower. RPS cannot wait 30 years for revenue that is not even guaranteed to exist. At the state level, the increased property taxes in the TIF would cause a reduction in state funding that our schools cannot afford.

Additionally, we are deeply concerned about the financial risk this project presents to the city. The TIF is significantly larger than the area that will be developed. This means that the TIF would be capturing new revenue that would otherwise be available for schools. Although developers have suggested that

the project presents no risk to the city because the bonds are 'non-recourse', the reality is that the bonds still must be paid first, as does the interest and insurance on these bonds. This means funding for schools would be a long way off and is not guaranteed.

As educators, we feel it is our obligation to advocate for students both inside and outside of the classroom. Although there has been talk of a Community Benefits Agreement that would result in affordable housing; minority business contracts; and high quality jobs, the developers have rejected grassroots feedback and an examination of these potential benefits. Such action has led us to the conclusion that the aforementioned may never materialize. The supposed 'affordable housing' that would be built is based on the AMI of the greater Richmond area, making it far from affordable for low-income families or even RPS staff. The job numbers appear to be inflated, and the jobs will be primarily low-wage, part-time, and temporary in nature. There is no way to legally obligate the developers to hire minority businesses, and they have set no specific goals for doing so. Lastly, the company that would run the Coliseum has an abysmal record of racial discrimination. We feel that the developers have been misleading in their communications about community benefits, which further erodes our trust in the project.

We further oppose the project because it has caused harm to RPS families through the closing of the downtown social services department and a dramatic increase in evictions from public housing. Additionally, a FOIA has revealed that the housing authority is illegally refusing to refill empty units in Creighton Court in direct connection to this project. Meanwhile, approximately 4,000 families are on the waiting list for public housing. And the developers have indicated that Gilpin Court will also be affected by the development. There is widespread public agreement that the impact will be negative.

Lastly, we are concerned that the Navy Hill evaluation process has been corrupted. We have seen citizens paid to hold signs and speak in favor of the project at meetings; and the revelation of ghost-written op-eds supporting the project. We have also examined the federal IRS complaint filed against the Navy Hill Development Corporation, and found that there is compelling evidence to suggest that NHDC is falsely masquerading as a non-profit when they are in fact lobbying for private financial gain.

For the reasons listed above, we, the Richmond Education Association, cannot, in good conscience, support the Navy Hill proposal. We are disappointed that the city has devoted so much time; attention; energy; and money to this endeavor when we have such urgent needs in our communities and in the nine districts in which our school buildings reside. We ask that the City Council joins us in opposing the Navy Hill proposal and continues to direct its attention to solving the more immediate problems that our citizens face.