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The State Senate
Atlanta, Georgia 30334

COMMITTEES:

Appropriations:

General Government Subcommittee
Criminal Justice Subcommittee

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DEMOCRATIC WHIP

August 7, 2014

The Honorable John McHugh
Secretary of the Army
1600 Army Pentagon
Washington, DC 20310-1600

RE: TRANSFER OF FORT MCPHERSON

Dear Secretary McHugh:

I am pleased to write to you today regarding the future of Fort McPherson. I have represented Georgia's 39th State Senate District since my election in 1996. I am privileged to have been reelected eight times; and I currently serve as Democratic Whip in the State Senate. I represent many neighborhoods in Atlanta and East Point that will be affected by the Fort McPherson redevelopment.

I am very concerned by recent events at the Fort McPherson Implementing Local Reuse Authority (MILRA) that, I believe, will ultimately harm the Army's interest and ability to successfully convey the property at Fort McPherson; and that will likewise negatively impact the men, women, and children that live in my legislative district. I am referring to MILRA's recent decision to enter into a secretive, sole source, exclusive negotiating period with a company who offered to buy approximately 350 acres of Fort McPherson to build a movie production studio there. This act represents an abandonment of the approved comprehensive reuse plan and is a betrayal of the citizens of East Point and Atlanta.

MILRA's predecessor organization, the McPherson Planning Local Reuse Authority (MPLRA) completed a comprehensive reuse plan for Fort McPherson in 2007, known as the *Fort McPherson Outreach and Land Use Plan*. It was formally modified in 2010 by a document called the *Fort McPherson Research Park Master Plan and District Conceptual Plan*. Both of these documents are the fruit of countless hours of local input derived from public meetings, charrettes, surveys, and stakeholder interviews. The people of my legislative district spoke loudly in favor of a mixed use development characterized by new housing opportunities, commercial developments, and an employment center anchored by a research park. The plans, funded by hundreds of thousands of grant dollars from the Office of Economic Adjustment, do not contemplate a movie studio – anywhere. It was not a consideration.

I am receiving overwhelming feedback from my constituents that they do not support the conveyance of Fort McPherson for any purposes other than those identified in the approved reuse plan. Conveying the property for a movie studio on a sole source basis represents a fundamental violation of every principle of social justice commonly accepted in our society today. The community feels, once again, like it was used simply to gain its support for a plan that will not be implemented. This is the old "bait and switch" that has been used for centuries to exclude people of color and the powerless from important economic decisions. We will not allow this repugnant trick to stand.

The reuse plan was not developed to enrich few people, but to uplift the entire community. At its heart is the creation of jobs and affordable homes for our people, and for future generations. It was supposed to integrate the Fort into our neighborhoods. Maintaining fortress walls to keep the people “out” is in direct violation of the plan’s most fundamental principles. The plan requires the integration of the Fort into our neighborhoods, not the continuation of a desolate island unapproachable by its neighbors.

In addition, the community tirelessly worked to put together a *Fort McPherson Community Action Plan*. This plan recommended many community benefits including: job training, transit oriented development, and an affordable housing plan which integrates the Fort’s development and the nearby community.

I also believe that there is a real risk that the secret plan has not been adequately vetted in the Army’s Final Environmental Impact Statement. The EIS was largely based on forecasted intensities inherent to the Land Use Plan. All of the work, legal analysis, and conclusions contained in the EIS may very well be called into question at this point. Going forward with the development of a movie studio may require a new EIS, or an amendment to it. We demand to fully understand the environmental impacts associated with the movie studio in order to adequately protect our neighborhoods and our children.

A federal law suit has already been filed against the LRA, Army, and others related to the unsolicited, secretive, and sole-source nature of the proposed plan. Additional legal action could follow. I think it is very important to stress, however, that the men and women in my District do not wish to pursue the redress of potential legal claims through the court system. We do not generally have the means, nor do we want to postpone the implementation of approved redevelopment plans, by filing legal complaints. For this reason, I am asking you – and calling on the Army – to do the right thing by using your authority to strongly urge the LRA to implement the very plans that were funded and approved by the United States Army. What good is a Planning LRA if the Implementing LRA chooses to ignore the plan? It is a waste of taxpayer money, it is a betrayal of the men and women who contributed countless hours in good faith to create plans, and it calls into question the validity and accuracy of the EIS.

Finally I am concerned that this is occurring in a predominately African-American community. I wonder if this would happen in other communities.

Please join me in strongly urging the LRA to implement the plans they previously approved. I urge you to carefully consider the ramifications of moving forward in light of the damage that will occur if this is not immediately addressed. Please do not be an accomplice to this terrible act of injustice.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Vincent Fort', with a stylized flourish extending to the right.

State Senator Vincent Fort
39th District

CC: Felker Ward, MILRA Board Chair
John Lewis
David Scott