

Witnesses Rap Culture Center Street Closing

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Eradicating the southwestern tail-end of New Hampshire Avenue would be just fine for the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, but it would bottle up 900 car-driving families, deny 100 restaurant employees access to their jobs and is probably illegal, anyway.

These were the principal arguments against closing of streets and alleys involved in the Kennedy Center construction advanced yesterday by five witnesses at a D.C. Commissioners' hearing in the District Building.

Center officials must get the Commissioners' approval before they can close public use areas encompassed by the Kennedy structure.

Excavation Starts Soon

A contract for excavation of the site has been awarded to Curtin & Johnson, Inc., for \$78,682, it was learned yesterday, and work is expected to begin on undisputed sections of the land within ten days to two weeks. A construction contract is expected to be let within 30 to 60 days.

The 900 families will be the eventual population of the Watergate Project, which is constructing or planning a total of five apartment buildings along Virginia and New Hampshire Avenues, adjacent to the site.

William R. Lichtenberg, counsel for Watergate, told Commissioner John B. Duncan that eliminating a one-acre wedge of New Hampshire Avenue between F Street and Rock Creek Parkway would leave Watergate residents only one route in and out of the project—north and south on New Hampshire Avenue between the project and Virginia Avenue. They would have no access to the Parkway.

Lichtenberg added: "When public functions are held at the Center, there will be an enormous backup of traffic. During such periods, it would be virtually impossible to enter or leave the Watergate Project by car at the New Hampshire Avenue entrance."

Ralph Becker, counsel for the Center, countered that the Watergate people knew about the taking of a portion of New Hampshire Avenue when they planned their project. Lichtenberg denied this.

Becker added that the public purpose served by the Kennedy Center overrides the needs of Watergate residents.

Shuts Route To Work

The 100 restaurant employees work at the Water Gate Inn at the intersection of F Street and Rock Creek Parkway. They were represented by Martha Carter, who said that if New Hampshire Avenue were closed there would be no way for them to get to work.

Water Gate Inn, a long-time landmark on the Potomac shoreline, has been condemned to make way for the Center, but an appeal is pending in the courts.

The legality of the street-closing was questioned by John R. Immer, president of the D.C. Federation of Citizens Associations and a vocal opponent of the Center site. Immer reiterated a point made previously that the statutory boundaries of the Center do not include New Hampshire Avenue and that its in-

clusion is therefore illegal. He urged the Commissioners to bounce the problem back to Congress for clarification.

Becker claimed that the issue had been thoroughly thrashed out in Congress and that it's intent clearly was to allow the taking of some land outside the boundaries.

Duncan took the matter under advisement. Walter N. Tobriner, president of the Commission, and a member of the Kennedy Center board, disqualified himself. Charles M. Duke, Engineer Commissioner, was at another hearing.