

4/10/12 H.D.

1415 Otis Street
18329# NE

Paul Chretien, agent for the owners & dba
CALIFORNIA BUILDERS, Inc. &
Florence Jaumotte & Louis Bell, owners.

Board of Zoning Adjustment
District of Columbia Office & Zoning
441 4th Street NW
Suite – 200 South
Washington, DC., 20001

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28th November, 2011

Re: Jaumotte-Bell Residence
1415 Otis Street, NE

To the Board:

The existing single family residence was built in the early 50's circa 1952, and is located in an R-1-B zone. The Area Variance requested is to add an additional story & a-half on top of the structure to accommodate a "living area and guest bedroom suite" in the top attic story, which only encompasses 60% of the floor area of the proposed 2nd story below it, with no change or expansion to the overall building footprint. Due to the uniqueness of this lot & the difficult existing site conditions, the ground floor plan is considered a "story" by the BZA, making the proposed 1 & ½ story addition a "fourth floor" addition, not a third story attic addition as it should have been considered under normal conditions. The height to proposed new ceiling is only 34.8 feet, well within the maximum 40.0 foot limitation. No change is proposed to the single family dwelling use status.

BOARD OF ZONING ADJUSTMENT
District of Columbia

CASE NO.

18329

EXHIBIT NO.

19

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Response to the three Tests for Approval of Variance

1. Physical Characteristics of the Property

The unusual topography of this particular site has caused the ground floor to be built eight (8) feet below the grade on three (3) sides except for the front facing "Otis" Street. This was done because the house was placed on the property by the original builder backwards to save construction costs. Normally, one (1) story ramblers have a walk-out basement to the rear of the property. In this special case, the rear of the property faces the street. This is unique: the walk-out basement door & the 1st floor formal entrance & front door vestibule are both facing "Otis" street.

Peculiarity of this particular property: the living area is on the top of the current house, with the cellar/basement only accessible from "Otis" street side. The real & original 1st floor of this house is evidenced by the formal entrance door facing "Otis" Street on the right side of the property. This requires walking up the stairs following the steeply inclined grade around the right side of the house to the front entrance. The property slopes up from the street, not down as a normal walk-out basement properties do.

The "cellar" ground floor has only a partial usable footprint, as evidenced by a whopping 70% of this floor space dedicated to a storage room, a furnace room, a laundry room & a 1-car garage. Barely 30% of this cellar/basement floor is usable; in fact, only the hallway & the mudroom are usable, which the mudroom has as of late been converted to a "makeshift" entrance. Also, the ceiling height in this cellar / basement foundation is just barely seven (7) feet, which is OK in principle for cellar use, but definitely not considered adequate for livable or habitable space. This ground floor has no windows to the exterior on three (3) sides, with no natural light illuminating interior spaces, & is primarily used for storage & service areas. In addition to having been sunk in the ground on all 3 sides as it has been, it is almost always damp after a rainstorm, evidence by creeping & reoccurring mildew, etc. & thereby further reducing this area as living space & value to the property...

Having this floor considered a “story” or “habitable space” makes it impossible to add additional 1 & ½ floors of living space to the top of the house without a Variance.

To dig the basement down an additional two (2) feet for additional ceiling heights; &/or to change the natural grade around the perimeter of the house by digging it down & lowering it 2 feet so natural light could flow into the cellar to be able to convert it into living space is not a viable solution as other problems would thereby arise, like water running into the foundation instead of off to the street, exorbitant excavation & dirt removal costs, etc. This is not a realistic nor a feasible solution to this dilemma.

Also, to require the property owners to build behind their house to get the square footage & to add additional basement area underneath a new rear first floor not only would be going against the uphill flow of the land, it would also require the cutting down of several 85 year old chestnut oak shade trees that not only add beauty to the neighborhood, but also provide life to numerous wildlife, such as native birds, squirrels, etc. This also would require substantial excavation & earthmoving expenses, not to mention the water issues & an expensive earth retention system of potentially bad soil like marine clay which has been found in the borderline district neighborhoods. The proposed addition of another 1 & ½ stories does not change the building footprint, nor increase the overall lot coverage. Denial of the variance would impose a financial hardship on the owners in that they would not be able to use the property to the extent typical of the other houses in this neighborhood (this house has only (1) one usable floor plus a cellar, other typical houses in this neighborhood have 2 & ½ floors plus a basement foundation). By granting this Variance, this house would conform to the standards of the other houses in this neighborhood.

2. No substantial detriment to the Public Good.

Granting this variance will cause no harm to the public good. In fact, it will contribute substantially to the public good & appearance. This older house has a significantly lower than average cellar floor to ground floor ceiling height (only 7 feet) & the current

1st floor ceiling height is only eight (8) foot tall. The grade of the house on three (3) sides is level with the current 1st floor & the cellar on three (3) sides is buried eight (8) feet completely underground. The house currently has a very low slung unattractive box type of profile as the house currently has a flat paraffin-type of roofing system resulting in a house that is significantly shorter than the surrounding traditional style homes. Even with the proposed addition to this older shoe box type house, the proposed new project will blend in with the other houses directly adjoining it on both sides & across the street from it. It will not be out of proportion with any of the houses on the street & will not stick out nor above like a sore thumb. The front of the addition has been designed with steeply pitched side metal covered roof and a rear bedroom dormer, to allow the massing to recede from the sides & to visually reduce the apparent height. The strong horizontal line of the existing cornice (future band board) is maintained to further diminish the presence of an additional floor & a half. None of the surrounding & adjoining neighbors with-in a 200 foot circular zone have any objections to the proposed addition as attested to their signed letter of support statements. They all believe it will enhance their neighborhood, & are completely in favor of this variance.

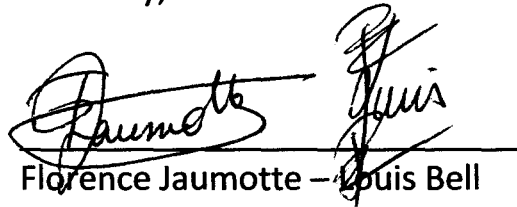
3. Consistent with the General Intent & Purpose of the Zoning Regulations

The proposed addition is consistent with the general intent & purpose of the Zoning Regulations in that it complies with all requirements except for the number of stories. Given that the ground cellar floor is not practically a “story” in that its perimeter is nearly 87% & eight (8) feet underground, the addition of a top “attic” floor of only 60% floor area of the 2nd story below it that is within the height limit does indeed comply with the intent of the Regulations. Also, within the immediate context, there are several houses of (4) four stories and/or greater heights than what is proposed, so allowing the variance would not create an exception to what is typical in this area. It should be also noted, that this property is with-in two (2) blocks of the commercial area of 12th

Street with a wide range of building types, styles, heights & number of stories.

We wish to thank you in advance for your consideration of this application, and respectfully request that you grant this Variance.

Sincerely,



Florence Jaumotte – Louis Bell



Paul Chretien - Agent

