

Preserve Our Green Space In Sheridan-Kalorama

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TESTIMONY BEFORE THE DC BOARD OF ZONING APPEALS

IN THE MATTER OF BZA APPLICATION No. 18398

November 7, 2012

Thank you, Chair and Members of the Board for this opportunity to testify on behalf of Preserve Our Green Space in Sheridan-Kalorama. I am Jim Pepper, vice president.

The mission of Preserve Our Green Space is to protect historically and architecturally significant public and private green space, gardens and parks in Sheridan-Kalorama for their value to the quality of life of our neighbors and to the character and health of the City as a whole. The Sheridan-Kalorama neighborhood has received national recognition because of its distinctive value as a "verdant enclave in the heart of the City." The zoning regulations and boundaries are well attuned to protect this essential character of our neighborhood. That protected green character of our neighborhood is a major part of the quality of life of every homeowner and resident, including the neighbors to the proposed project.

We oppose the application for a special exception under Section 223, for the proposed project.

The applicant's statement appears to present a request for a simple exception. We have followed the evolution of this proposal. It is not simple. It is not consistent with the intent of the zoning regulations. We believe this project if approved will have substantial adverse effect on the use and enjoyment of the neighbor's property and the intended protections for the neighborhood. On the other hand, if the board does not approve this application, we believe there will be no hardship.

The significant adverse effects are not obvious in the application.

First: although the application calls it a 'breezeway,' the structure proposed to be erected in the garden is not a breezeway at all. It is a two-tiered, elaborately appointed, elevated living space with hallway and half-bath. Its 2nd tier is a walkway with high-concept railings.

The effect of this hallway structure is to eliminate one-fourth of what currently is an open, formal, designed garden.

Second, although the application says the purpose of the project is to create a “more functional, and more suitable” house for “modern living standards,” in fact the project would build one unified structure that will have the effect of compromising the garden and walling off a neighbor from a significant amount of the view, the sun and the light.

Structures throughout our neighborhood, including the adjacent 2128 Bancroft, are designed to enjoy the highly diverse views of garden and green space now, and this is not a “negligible” or insignificant thing, despite the narrative in the application. It directly effects the intent of the Sheridan-Kalorama zoning requirements that, if allowed to function without this exception, will protect these gardens and provide these open views for the mutual enjoyment of all the neighbors.

This is not a case where the applicant found after years of living here that the property is not suitable for modern living standards. Rather, the owner, knowing of the existing zoning and easement, bought the house with the intention of eliminating the features of garden, light, sun and view that are so significant to the neighborhood. This goes to the heart of disharmony with the general intent of the zoning regulations. This owner had, and still has, the opportunity to buy a different house that meets his needs without sacrificing the qualities of 2130 Bancroft that our zoning brings.

Third: although the application states that the space below the hallway structure will be open for “increased landscaping,” in fact it will eliminate mature Camellia trees now growing in that space. Camellia trees are a threatened species in the wild, and a delightful garden amenity for the neighbors as well as this property.

Fourth, although the application says that the neighbors requested the green roof and plantings on the new deck above the proposed master bedroom suite over the existing garage, the fact is we are unaware of any support whatever in the neighborhood for this feature or anything about this proposal. This proposed green roof does not mitigate the loss of the garden caused by the hallway structure. It is only replacing the existing, abundantly planted deck above the current garage.

Finally, although the application seeks to create the appearance that the expanded house will be “compatible” with neighboring, nonconforming lot occupancies, there are at least two things wrong with this contention. ONE – the zoning regulations were, of course, put in place to avoid future loss of character and value to the neighborhood, not to seek a new standard of least possible compliance. TWO, it is a vastly misleading statement concerning the number of similar properties in the neighborhood with garage and courtyard/gardens in the neighborhood, and minimizes the broader public policy attack on the reasons for the existing standards represented by this application. Right now in fact there are many other comparable courtyards and gardens in the neighborhood to this

one. There are more than 40 houses in the neighborhood with similar layout, or more than 65 if you begin to include detached, with similar courtyard/gardens.

The existing nonconforming lot occupancy of 62%, will jump to 70% with this project. The effect will be to destroy a significant part of a formal garden that is substantial amenity for the neighborhood and is protected by existing zoning. The special exception if granted would not be in harmony with the purpose of our zoning.

The large hallway will block the view of the garden and of light and sun for one neighbor, and two neighbors will lose significant garden views. Currently, the existing ground level space to be covered and compromised by the hallway structure, is the place that gets most of the early afternoon summer sun, of primary value to a garden and those who enjoy it, that will be lost with this exception. Very little sun will penetrate in the late afternoon under the hallway structure as proposed. This will deprive both adjacent neighbors of much of a primary value of living in the neighborhood, its green space and gardens.

This is an adverse effect, in the meaning of section 3104.1 of the zoning regulations.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this testimony.

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EXHIBITS ATTACHED:

- 1. PHOTO: Existing Garden with mature Camellia trees**
- 2. Aerial View: Sheridan-Kalorama depicting green space**

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RE: No. 18398, 2130 Bancroft Place: The proposed HALLWAY with 2nd tier walkway would destroy mature Camellia trees, and cut down on light, sun and ground level garden for neighbors and the property of 2130 alike, creating one structure with significant impacts on the viability and scale of the garden.



RE: No. 18398, 2130 Bancroft Place: Aerial photo of Sheridan-Kalorama. 2230 Bancroft Place is in the middle-right of the picture. Existing zoning has protected the public amenity of green space and gardens. When first developed 100 years ago, abundant planting and gardens were part of the planning and development of Kalorama Heights, and remain important to the use and enjoyment of neighboring properties today.