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Government of the District of Columbia
Board of Zoning Adjustment
441 4th St NW, Suite 200/210-S
Washington, DC 20001

September 23, 2013

RE: BZA Case Number 18632

To Whom It May Concern:

My name is Michael Hochman and I am writing with respect to Board of Zoning Adjustment ("BZA") Case Number 18632 regarding the planned development by 14th & U Residential LLC/Madison Investment, LLC (the "Developer") of the property located at 1921-23 14th Street NW, 1925 14th Street NW and 1351 Wallach PI NW (the "Project"). My wife and I own and reside at 1349 Wallach PI NW, which is the property adjacent to the Project (across a small alley) and we believe that as a result of our close proximity to the Project, the BZA should afford particular weight to this letter

We are pleased that the site for the Project has been identified for development, as the current state of that site has been neglected for some time. Additionally, we are pleased with the efforts of the Developer to reach out to us and the neighborhood as a whole to get our input into the Project. The Developer appears as is if they will be good neighbors and will be a welcome addition to the neighborhood. However, despite the goodwill of the Developers and the potential benefits the Project will have for the neighborhood, we do have some serious concerns with the current plans for the Project.

Off Street Parking

The Developer is seeking a variance from the BZA for the number of off street parking spaces required to be included in a building of this type. Based on a letter delivered by the Developer to the residents of Wallach PI on September 4, 2013, the current design of the Project includes zero off street parking places. The reason the Developer gave in their letter was that due to the space limitations, the price of the parking spaces would be "prohibitively expensive." As the BZA surely knows, the area around 14th and U has become a very popular place for people to live and to go out to bars and restaurants. The parking situation in the neighborhood is already extremely limited and the addition of a 56-unit building without any parking will only make the situation worse. In addition, the current use for a portion of the site is a parking lot that is usually full on nights and weekends. The removal of this parking lot plus the addition of 56 new units without any off street parking will only add further demand for an already limited supply of street parking.

The Developer has indicated that they will attempt to mitigate this issue by agreeing that residents of the Project will not be allowed to get on-street parking passes for the neighborhood and that they will have a transportation coordinator in the building to try to enforce the prohibitions against their residents parking on the street. While I appreciate these efforts, I am dubious that they will have much practical effect on the issue as (i) it is not clear to us that the prohibition against on-street parking passes is enforceable and (ii) I do not see how an on-site transportation coordinator will have any way to properly police where residents of the building are parking their cars.

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Building Design

Based on the design drawings that the Developers have shared with us, we have an additional concern regarding the design of the Project¹. The Project has two main elements: (i) the existing historic buildings and (ii) a new building that will replace the parking lot. Their design/refurbishment plans for the historic buildings look quite good and we are pleased with the eye for historic detail on those buildings that they have shown in the design drawings. However, their plans for the new building are completely incongruous with their design of the historic buildings and the rest of the neighborhood. I believe that the parking lot property provides a wonderful opportunity as a blank slate for a developer to come in and create an interesting and exciting space that would blend in with the surrounding area and would be space that could be a real draw for businesses and residents to the neighborhood. The current glass and steel design would damage the historic nature of a beautiful turn of the century block as it is too large, too heavy and too modern to fit in with the existing buildings. The juxtaposition with the refurbished historic buildings would be glaring. Simply because other large buildings are currently being built in and around the neighborhood is not enough of a justification to continue the trend. The neighborhood should be a mix of old and new and there should be as seamless a transition between the two as possible – not a tall metal tower that awkwardly sticks out from its surroundings.

Other Issues

Due to our proximity to the Project, we have certain other issues related to the actual construction of the Project (noise, vibration, loss of access to our off-street parking, tower crane, etc.), but we will address those with the appropriate parties in the appropriate forum.

I would like to reiterate my statement that I am happy that the Developer is looking to redevelop these properties and we have been encouraged by their engagement with the neighborhood to date. We look forward to continuing to work with the Developer to create a Project that will be an exciting and beneficial addition to the neighborhood. I would request that the BZA carefully consider both the current design of the Project and the concerns of the neighborhood in making its decision. I am happy to discuss this further with the BZA if there are any questions regarding this letter.

Regards,



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¹ We acknowledge that this may not be a BZA issue, but this is a concern that we want to publicly state