

Testimony of Emily Hotaling Eig Before the D.C. Board of Zoning Adjustment re: 14th Street and Wallach Place, N.W.

Good morning,

My name is Emily Hotaling Eig. I am an architectural historian and preservation specialist with EHT Traceries. I am here this morning to speak regarding the historic preservation issue associated with the proposed project at 14th Street and Wallach Place, N.W.

First, some background on the two historic buildings extant on the project site. 1921-23 14th Street and 1351 Wallach Place both include a building located on the southern side of the project site in lots 180 and 140 (now 806). The vacant area to the rear of 1921-1923 is vacant land currently paved as an entry to Lot 196, which is being used as a parking lot.

1921-23 14th Street (Square 237 Lot 180) was constructed in 1904 to the design of Harding and Upman, and built by Henry Kluckhuhn, who built several similar mixed commercial-residential properties nearby on 14th Street. 1921-23 was described in the original permit documents as “stores and flats.” This building has been identified in the Greater U Street Historic National Register documentation as a contributing resource to the historic district. The buildings are three stories in height with a raised basement, built of brick with two oriel windows. The storefronts were fitted with large plate glass windows, and were initially occupied by a barbershop owned by Nicolo Anastasi and a coffee shop owned by John Wilkins. This building is in very poor condition.

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1351 Wallach Place (Square 237 Lot 806 [140]) was constructed in 1897 for E J DeLacy, a local contractor, to the design of Washington architect Julius Germueller, most likely as a speculative venture. It was purchased by Christian Meininger, an estate agent, and he lived there until the 1920s. This building is also a contributing resource to the Greater U Street Historic District. It was constructed as a single-family residence in a style that interestingly mixes Italianate, Romanesque, and Greek Revival elements. Germueller had a long career in DC designing nearly 300 residences, many of them in row house blocks for small-scale developers, as well as small institutional and religious buildings. This residence is also currently in very poor condition.

I have not participated in the design development of this project, and have been asked for my review and evaluation of the project's approach to the preservation and rehabilitation of the two historic buildings. This project is scheduled to go before HPRB at its October public meeting on October 24th. The review board will address the refinement of the design of the new building, while the issue before you today is the treatment of 1921 14th Street and 1351 Wallach Place. Therefore, I will limit my comments to the results of my evaluation as it relates to the project's compatibility with the Greater U Street Historic District and its approach to preservation and rehabilitation of the historic buildings.

D.C. Law 2-144, the Historic Landmark and Historic District Protection Act, calls for "retain[ing] and enhance[ing] those properties which contribute to the character of the historic district and to encourage their adaptation for current use", "assur[ing] that alterations of existing structures are compatible with the character of the historic district", and "assur[ing] that new construction [is] compatible with the character of the historic district"

To assist in meeting the law, HPRB has identified twelve design principles for evaluating the compatibility of new construction within historic districts, including setback, orientation, scale,

proportion, rhythm, massing, height, materials, color, roof shape, details and ornamentation, and landscape features.

The height of the proposed building is within the parameters of existing building heights in the Greater U Street Historic District. Along 14th Street, both in the Greater U Street Historic District and the adjacent Greater 14th Street Historic District, buildings are mixed in height. Greater U Street Historic District is defined by its up and down skyline, which is the product of the construction of tall apartment and institutional buildings along main corridors and smaller residential buildings on the side streets. Perhaps even more significantly, the height is held back from the corner of 14th Street and Wallach Place and this is maintained along the Wallach Place elevation. This minimizes the effect of the massing of the building on the narrow Wallach place and its small-scale residential streetscape.

The proposed materials of glass and metal are compatible with other new construction in the Greater U Street Historic District, and the color, details, and ornamentation are similarly compatible.

The scale, proportion, and massing of the building are compatible with other new construction in the Greater U Street Historic District.

The roof of the proposed building is flat and not visible from the public right of way, which is consistent with many tall buildings on 14th Street.

Landscaping is limited to the streetscape and that will follow D C Streetscape regulations.

The Secretary of Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation addresses new construction in Standard #9, stating that "new additions, exterior alterations, or related new construction shall not destroy historic materials that characterize the property. The new work shall be differentiated from the old and shall be compatible with the massing, size, scale, and architectural features to protect the historic integrity of the property and its environment"

The proposed project is consistent with the relevant Standard and there are four particular reasons why the project succeeds in its treatment of the associated historic structures

- 1) Significantly and unusually as most new construction in the District of Columbia that directly engages historic property is built "into" the historic buildings, blending the two, this new construction is immediately adjacent but does not actually encroach on either building. Based on the current design, the historic buildings will remain completely intact.

In my professional opinion, building over the historic properties would be unacceptable from a historic preservation perspective. In recent years, the D C Historic Preservation Review Board has discouraged roof top additions that are visible from public view. Thus, the site becomes more restrictive. The Applicant did an excellent job pulling the massing away from the historic buildings, and, as a result, also minimizes the view of the new construction from Wallach Place.

- 2) The larger of the new constructions, the apartment building, is clearly distinguishable from the historic buildings.
- 3) The new infill structure set between the two historic buildings (in the existing vacant lot between the buildings) and oriented to face onto Wallach Place is designed in height, scale, and massing to be compatible with the historic buildings. In my professional opinion, not only is design of the infill compatible, it is both desirable and appropriate to properly incorporate the historic structures with the new construction and provide an idea scale and pedestrian view from the street. If the vacant lot was left undeveloped, it would create a visual void and take away from the urban streetscape.
- 4) The proposed rehabilitation is based on an understanding of the original appearance of related buildings. The work includes
 - a Removal of non-historic paint from the exterior brickwork
 - b Repair of the historic stonework

- c Rehabilitation of existing historic wooden windows, and replacement of in kind of missing windows
 - d Rehabilitation of the historic storefronts on 1921-23 14th Street
 - e Rehabilitation of the upper level interior spaces of 1921-23 14th Street and the interior spaces of 1351 Wallach Place into apartment units, compatible with their original uses as dwellings
- 5) In my professional opinion, building over the historic properties would be unacceptable from a historic preservation perspective. Thus, the site becomes more restrictive and the Applicant did a wonderful job pulling the massing away from the historic buildings.
- 6) The larger of the new constructions, the apartment building, is clearly distinguishable from the historic buildings. The new infill structure set between the two historic buildings (in the existing vacant lot between the buildings) and oriented to face onto Wallach Place is designed in height, scale, massing, and set back to be compatible with the historic buildings.

Therefore, it is my professional opinion that this project will concurrently rehabilitate these long neglected historic buildings for new, compatible use in a manner consistent with the D C Historic Landmark and Historic District Protection Act and the Secretary of the Interior Standards, and install new construction that is harmonious with the appearance and purpose of the historic buildings. The project's approach to the preservation of these buildings, which will result in the retention and rehabilitation of these buildings as proposed is exemplary and will enhance our understanding and appreciation of the Greater U Street Historic District .

