

TESTIMONY of
JOE FINDLAY, 1426 RHODE ISLAND AVE., NW

As one of the immediate neighbors, and designated representative of the 1426 Rhode Island Ave. Condominium Association's 16 residents, I am pleased to appear before you today in support of the Helix Hotel's proposed renovation and expansion project.

Since moving adjacent to the Helix Hotel in 2007, the establishment has repeatedly proven itself to be an asset both to the neighborhood and to the city. The hotel management and staff has been an active partner with its neighbors and guests to run a hotel that fits well into its largely residential street. Since the Helix has decided to expand, the hotel's management and owners have worked with us to listen to our concerns about the proposed design and construction work. We are pleased with the hotel's ideas for its renovation and look forward to an improved hotel as a fixture in our neighborhood.

While we are aware that the forthcoming construction will entail noise and disruptions (particularly involving the alleyway behind our building), I am confident that the Helix will work to minimize any inconveniences. As it stands, the hotel's daily operations (such as linen delivery or trash pick-up) have always been well-managed to minimize disturbance to its many neighbors.

I am here on behalf of the 16 residents living next door to the hotel to offer our collective, enthusiastic support for the Helix's plans for its property and urge the BZA to once again approve the hotel's renovation and expansion project.

A summary of the reasons that we are urging you to support this application include:

1. THE HOTEL WORKED WITH THE COMMUNITY AND ADDRESSED ISSUES

- You've heard the hotel testify that it reached out to the community and its immediate neighbors about its proposed expansion and tried to work with everyone about any concerns or temporary adverse impacts.
- I am here to confirm that they indeed DID take those steps – they were very active, engaged, forthright and responsive in those efforts
- We know that this Board encourages neighbors and parties to work come together to work out their differences and the hotel did just that
- Of course, sometimes you cannot resolve all differences, but as the condo and 16 residents most directly affected by the proposed expansion and construction, we are very pleased that the hotel has address all our issues

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2. LIKE THE 2007 PROPOSAL THE BZA APPROVED, THIS PROPOSED EXPANSION IS "DE MINIMUS": NEGATIVE IMPACTS WILL BE MINIMAL AND TEMPORARY WHILE POSITIVE EFFECTS HAVE POTENTIAL TO BE MAJOR AND LASTING.

- The minor expansion proposed by the hotel will go a long way to completing the transformation of the 14th Street corridor over the past two decades
- By expanding the conference room space, the hotel will be able to attract a different clientele, one that is geared toward business travelers who will be attending small conferences at the hotel
- There will be less dependence on the tourist/destination traveler or patrons who are more interested in the nightlife of 14th Street
- While we will have to endure the disruption and noise of construction when the expansion takes place, we realize this is only temporary
- Moreover, the hotel has committed to stabilizing and addressing the issues with our property line wall, which is significant to us

3. OPPONENTS MIS-UNDERSTAND THE NATURE OF THE EXPANSION

- We note in the submissions to the record that the opponents to this applications state that the increased conference space will bring 150 new hotel guests to the site and thus significantly more traffic, noise and congestion
- Their fears, however, are based on a misunderstanding. An expansion to create a conference room to accommodate 150 guests is not the same as adding 150 hotel rooms
- More likely, they are simply capturing existing guests in the hotel and keeping them on-site
- Once you understand this basic fact, it's impossible to reach all the purported adverse impacts suggested by the opponents

4. FACTS AND RATIONALE FOR APPROVING VARIANCES IN 2007 ARE THE SAME; BOARD SHOULD APPROVE THIS APPLICATION WITH SLIGHT INCREASE IN SQUARE FOOTAGE ON SAME BASIS.
- The Board gave very thoughtful consideration to all the facts and circumstances warranting the variance relief in 2007 and concluded that the Helix Hotel met the 3-part test for variance relief.
 - The property is still encumbered by the same extraordinary and exceptional circumstances described by the applicant this morning that make it difficult to create the necessary conference space within the existing hotel footprint.
 - We urge the Board to rely on the precedent of its earlier decision and once again grant the requested relief.