

September 13, 2015

D.C. Board of Zoning Adjustment
441 4th Street, NW
Washington, DC 20001

RE: BZA CASE No. 18991 Appeal of Permit for 1521 Varnum Street, N.W.

Dear BZA Members:

I am writing to support the appeal by John Stokes to revoke the building permits for a proposed seven-unit, three-story apartment building at 1521 Varnum St NW.

I won't reiterate the excellent assertions made by others as to the harm this project will do to the character of our neighborhood and to our property values, all of which I agree with. Rather, I will describe how the proposed project will directly affect my family and me.

My wife and I have owned and occupied 4310 15th Street NW since 2003. Our house is less than 50 yards from the subject property, and is bordered on two sides by the narrow and badly deteriorated service alley that runs behind the 4300 block of 15th and between the 1500 blocks of Varnum and Webster, and which will service the four-car parking lot proposed for 1521 Varnum St. The south wall of our house directly abuts the alley.

The portion of the alley running behind Varnum leads downhill directly toward our backyard, where it T-turns at the stretch running parallel to 15th Street, and then turns again 90 degrees to run downhill east along the side of our house to 15th Street. During moderate rain, the alley becomes a high-volume creek, made worse by the poorly planned large church parking lot at the top of the alley adjacent to 1521 Varnum. In heavy rain, it becomes a raging flash flood so severe that my neighbor and I paid to have a concrete curb-like "dam" built behind our properties to keep the water from flooding straight across our yards and into our basement stairwells (and basements).

I'm concerned that the creation of even more paved parking will worsen this flash flooding problem. Worse, I'm concerned that the dangerous lead and other dust and debris that will be produced by wholly or partly demolishing a nearly 100 year old house, and by massive construction, will flow down the alley onto my property, potentially harming my young children and as well as children who scooter and play in the alley.

In addition, the 90-degree turn at the southwest corner of our property is especially difficult to navigate. Trucks – including DC garbage trucks – and large SUVs routinely can't make the turn and drive over and damage the now-crumbling end portion of my driveway retaining wall. The thought of increased number of large construction and moving trucks driving over my retaining wall is certainly unappealing. As is the prospect of the additional vehicular and foot traffic created by converting a single occupancy dwelling into 7 apartment units!

For these reasons, and for those expressed by my neighbors, I fully support John Stokes' appeal to revoke the building permits for 1521 Varnum St NW

Sincerely,

James D.P. Bishop III
4310 15th Street, NW