

September 14, 2015

Re: Board of Zoning Adjustment: case number **18991**.

Regarding Property: 1521 Varnum St NW.

To Whom it May Concern:

We are writing in opposition of the development of the row house at 1521 Varnum St, NW, which a non-DC based developed is planning to turn into a seven unit apartment building. We feel strongly that it will impact our neighborhood negatively in the following ways:

There have been numerous reports on the poor quality of work by the developer – and we are extremely concerned, as the parents of young children, about the toxic fumes and other related construction hazards resulting from the new development.

The alley behind the house is not a direct or through alley. It is an L shaped alley that is much smaller than the ones on neighboring blocks. It was designed for family homes. A large condominium building will cause further congestion for trash and recycling pickup, as well as an increase in the number of unwanted rodents given the lack of open space. The planned parking and dumpster bins are not suited to this space.

Our streets were designed for parking for single family homes, and were not zoned for large scale condo projects. Parking near our houses is one of the benefits of the neighborhood with families with small children and one of the reasons we moved here. This will become more limited with the large number of new condos.

When we moved into this neighborhood 12 years ago, there was a great deal of criminal activity – with many houses that were selling illegal substances. After much work by the neighborhood and new families moving in, these having been turned into family homes, many with children. After many years, we now have a large number of small children in the area – and for the first time in many years –have large groups of neighborhood middle school children walking to catch the city bus to go to school.

The construction and traffic jams caused by the on-going renovation in a quiet neighborhood would cause an even greater risk to our small children – and our new 6th graders walking to catch the bus for the first time this year. Many of those on our street will need to walk through

the dangerous equipment needed, and the toxic dust created by the project, to get to the bus stop.

The charm of 16th street Heights is the neighborhood feel in a large city. The property in question is in a row of houses that remains in pristine condition from when they were constructed in the 1920s – the same color, style and well-kept condition. There are many neighborhoods where the architecture has been compromised. It would be a shame to allow this to happen. 1521 Varnum was one of the key properties highlighting the need to have pop-ups regulated. Many neighbors have been recently reinforcing and restoring the original walls. It is rarer and rarer to find full rows of houses in this condition in the district – and it would be a tragedy as you will never be able to get this architecture back.

The house shares a roof and walls – and completely reconfiguring one of these homes will lead to damage not just to the immediate neighbor, but to the entire row as it will put pressure on homes built nearly 100 years ago. The pressure on public utilities in the neighborhood is already at a maximum. Our aging sewer and utility systems were not designed for this size of building.

This condominium unit may result in economic benefit to the developer, but will make it much harder for the many families living in the neighborhood to want to stay for the long-term, as they will see a decrease in the value of their property. That is ultimately not good for the city as it tries to revitalize neighborhoods.

We hope you will consider our request, along with those of all our neighbors, to ensure that our neighborhood continues to be a safe and livable place for the families and individuals who live here.

Sincerely,

The block contains two handwritten signatures in black ink. The signature on the left is 'Erin Spinnell' and the signature on the right is 'William Spiel'. Both are written in a cursive, flowing style.

Erin and Bill Spinnell
1424 Varnum St NW
Washington, DC 20011