

To: The Board of Zoning Appeals

Fr: Cecelia Waldeck

Re: Statement on behalf of Appellant, BZA Case Number 18991, 1521 Varnum NW, Washington, D.C.

Introduction:

I am the owner of a row home at 4517 – 15th St. NW, Washington, D.C. and am very concerned about the negative impacts of the planned multi-unit apartment buildings at 1521 Varnum St. NW (“planned project”) on the quality of life in my neighborhood and the value of my home. Because our neighborhood is sandwiched between two major city thoroughfares populated by churches, businesses, embassies and other institutions, parking congestion is high. Locating on-street parking late at night and on street cleaning days is currently very difficult, especially for residents like me who do not own a garage. Increasing density to our neighborhood by permitting apartment buildings without requiring the developer to build underground parking facilities, coupled with D.C.’s failure to build more public parking infrastructure in the neighborhood, reflects a significant lack of understanding by city agencies and officials of neighborhood problems.

I respectfully request that the Zoning Board rescind the permits issued for the planned project at 1521 Varnum St. NW for the reasons described below. (The developer should be encouraged to design new plans for converting the existing single-family row home to condominium units in accordance with the 14-11 amendments):

D.C. Zoning Code Violations:

The planned project violates the following D.C. zoning and building codes:

- The zoning for the lot at 1521 Varnum Street NW is R-4, a zoning district for single-family homes, not multi-unit apartment buildings. The permitting documents do not show that the developer has obtained the proper R-5 or other zoning classification required for multi-unit apartment buildings.
- The proposed project involves a tear down of existing structures (except for a single fire wall) and the construction of two multi-unit structures, built from the ground-up. The second, three-story building in the back section of the lot replaces the existing garage which is regulated by Section 2500.4 as an accessory building. The walkway between the two three story buildings should not detract from the application of Section 2500.4 to the second building, an accessory building. Section 2500.4 requires that “[a]n accessory building in any zone district shall not exceed one (1) story or fifteen (15 ft) in height, except as provided in section 2500.5 (which permits a second story in R-1-A or R-1-B zones).
- The second, accessory building will abut both a side and back alley and falls within the restrictions of Section 2507 for building on alley lots. Section 2507.3 bans the conversion or alteration of the existing garage, a non-residential structure, to a structure for human habitation and Section 2507.4 limits the height of the proposed second building. The planned three- story building height of the second building will

exceed "the distance from the opposite side of the alley to the outside wall" of the building, closest to the alley.

- A reasonable review of the planned project will lead to the conclusion that the size and purpose of the planned project violates the intent of the Zoning Codes which, pursuant to Section 101.1, requires the Board to interpret the various zoning code provisions in a manner that promotes the "public health, safety, morals, convenience, order, prosperity, and the general welfare to:
 - (A) Provide adequate light and air;
 - (B) Prevent undue concentration of population and the overcrowding of land; and
 - (C) Provide distribution of population, business and industry, and use of land that will tend to create conditions favorable to transportation, protection of property, civic activity, and recreational, educational, and cultural opportunities; and that will tend to further economy and efficiency in the supply of public services."

The height and width of the planned project will block the light and air enjoyed by neighboring lots. The number of future occupants of the two buildings (14+) greatly exceeds the number of occupants in any existing R-4 home in the neighborhood. Many of the 14+ new occupants will want to park their cars on Varnum St. NW or 15th St. NW because the city bans parking on 16th St. NW except on Sunday. On snow days, when neighbors are particularly territorial about their parking spaces, neighborhood tensions and conflicts will increase over parking. Many neighbors moved into the neighborhood because it is a low-density neighborhood with lower crime rates and lower parking congestion relative to zones with apartment buildings. The Zoning Board will significantly undercut neighbors' expectations if the issued permits are not rescinded.

Finally, rather than protecting the value of neighboring properties, the planned project destroys the architectural integrity and look of the adjacent row homes and nearby neighborhood homes, which lowers single-home property values. Attached to my statement, I am submitting pictures of new row home conversions that the Zoning Authorities have approved. I live two lots away from the three-unit condominium conversion at 1424 Buchanan St. NW ("1424"). The 1424 conversion, which is still under construction, interferes with my formerly private back yard area and its outside balconies and roof deck will lead to substantial noise in my yard and home after occupants move in. For over ten years, I have loved living in my Wardman home built in 1915; but, with the proliferation of cheaply-built row home conversions such as those shown in the attached pictures, I and other neighbors are beginning to consider leaving the neighborhood and the District to find property that is better protected by local zoning authorities.

Very truly yours,

Cecelia Walderick

Cecelia Waldeck
4517 – 15th St. NW
Washington, DC 20011

(202) 7626-1187