

September 1, 2015

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

**Re: BZA CASE NO. 18991
Appeal Permit for 1521 Varnum Street, NW**

Dear Members of the Board of Zoning Adjustment:

My name is Brian Crawford and I have been a resident of Washington, D.C. since 1998 and have owned my house at 1513 Varnum Street, NW since August of 2010. My wife, son and infant daughter live 4 houses down from the proposed **seven-unit, 2 bedroom** condo building located at 1521 Varnum Street, NW. We are vehemently opposed to the plans to convert a single-family residential dwelling (zoned R-4) on our family-friendly street into massive condo building that will adversely impact our neighborhood and urge you to support the appeal of John Stokes of 1519 Varnum Street, NW.

Let me begin by acknowledging the difficult balance that the Board of Zoning Adjustment (BZA), Zoning Commission (ZC) and the Zoning Administrator (ZA) must find between addressing the growing housing needs of the District with the rights of property owners.

Unfortunately, the zoning laws and regulations - as currently written - provide a loophole for non-resident developers and house flippers to take advantage of the DC housing boom, make a quick profit, and move onto the next project (all with tacit approval from the ZC and ZA). In doing so, they pay no regard to the neighbors they are greatly impacting nor neighborhoods they are changing for the worse.

The proposed plans for 1521 Varnum are now infamous and seen by many as arguably the most egregious “pop-up” in DC. Not only are the specs and plans completely out of character for the neighborhood, but they fraught with errors. Despite repeatedly changing and altering their plans to try to gain final approval, the developer has been hit with multiple stop work orders and intent to revoke letters. This proposed project has been a disaster from the start, and will undoubtedly continue to be a disaster of the BZA allows it to move forward. My neighbors on Varnum and Webster Streets are committed to stopping this project from moving forward and will consider any and all options available to us.

Let me provide you with an example which illustrates the problem that needs to be addressed by the BZA and ZC. In his letter dated August 11, 2014 addressed to the real estate attorney of the developer of 1521 Varnum Street, Zoning Administrator Matthew LeGrant states, **“The primary purpose the R-4 District shall be the stabilization of remaining one-family dwellings.”**

While these are his words, the actions he has taken run completely contrary protecting single family dwellings. Later in that same letter, Mr. LeGrant goes on to grant “minor flexibility” pursuant to §407.1 from the minimum lot area requirements (§401.3) for the development of a seven unit condominium building. In justifying this minor flexibility, Mr. LeGrant sites a single decision where the BZA affirmed a decision of the ZA to grant a deviation from the minimum lot area requirements “so as to alleviate the need to seek *de minimus* zoning relief from the Board.”

While the proposed development may seem “minor” Mr. LeGrant and to the Potomac, Maryland based developer of this project, building a new seven unit condo building on our street is not minor to me or my neighbors. This proposed development will significantly negatively impact parking, public transportation, the shared alley between Varnum and Webster Streets, and housing values. The large size and height of this building intrude on my privacy as there will be new condominiums overlooking my backyard. The plans call for 4 parking spaces but there are 14 bedrooms proposed in this building. If everyone owns a car, where will the other 10 cars park considering parking is at a premium on our street as it is?

I ask the Board:

- How is it that this type of project, where you are essentially razing an existing single family home and building an entirely new condo building, not deemed new construction?
- How does a property currently zoned as a single family, residential dwelling get approved to become a seven unit condo building without any public notice?
- Further, how is it that the ZA has authority to change the dynamics of an entire neighborhood, yet the owners and taxpayers of that neighborhood have NO say and NO recourse whatsoever?

In summary, I strongly urge the Board to revoke all of the building permits issued for 1521 Varnum Street. It is critical that the BZA, ZB, ZA and Planning Office work together to stop the exploitation of our neighborhoods by non-resident developers and to contain the rampant pop-up and pop-out construction.

Thank you for your attention to this critical matter.

Sincerely,

Brian Crawford
1513 Varnum Street, NW
Washington, DC 20011