

Case 19053, R-4 District, Premises at 446, 448, 450, and 452 Ridge Street, NW (Square 513, Lots 825-828)

To the Board of Zoning Adjustment:

We, the undersigned residents and property owners on the 400 block of Ridge Street NW, are writing to express our concerns regarding the developer Noon Reatig's request that the parking restrictions at 446, 448, 450, and 452 Ridge Street, NW imposed by the BZA be removed. These are to be four new two-family dwellings, with a potential of adding 16 or more vehicles to an already over-crowded street.

We request that the original Board of Zoning and Adjustment decision granting relief WITH parking restrictions, granted to the developer in January 2015, should remain in place. That January decision was a compromise which we fully support.

The developer's current request, that the parking restrictions be removed, is unjustified, unnecessary, unsupported, and contradicted by the facts, as we will discuss below.

Lack of Objectivity in the Developer's Parking "Study"

The developer has commissioned a parking "study," the conclusions of which were presented at the recent ANC meeting. The purpose of the study was to support the developer's claim that there is really no parking problem in Ridge Street neighborhood at all. This conclusion is contrary to the actual experiences of the residents who know better, and who will be directly affected by the BZA's decision.

Under questioning at the ANC hearing, the author of the study admitted he had made a point of excluding communication with every resident in the area, each of whom has an ongoing, intimate knowledge of the parking conditions and whose input would have been welcomed by anyone conducting a truly objective study.

Among other things, the study reports the existence of over 100 spaces available within four blocks of the subject property during its self-defined "peak" time of evenings after 9 p.m. We wish the developer would share the exact locations of each of these precious parking spaces, if they really exist. And if there are 100 spaces during this "peak" time, then there must be hundreds more during the "off-peak" time. We would welcome the knowledge of where those spaces are also, because after years of searching none of us is able to find them.

As to this "peak" time, the parking study reached its conclusions by failing to take into account such factors as street cleaning days and the subject property's proximity to the Convention Center, numerous churches, the Verizon Center, and other facilities that all attract large numbers of cars to the block. Besides all these difficulties, we are also one of the few blocks near the Convention Center, Metro, and downtown that offers zoned residential-only parking to Zones 2 and 6, attracting drivers from both of those jurisdictions in the daytime who park on the block and then proceed to their final

destinations. The competition is so fierce that residents find that when they move their car to go to the store or go on some other brief errand, they return to find NO PARKING AVAILABLE AT ALL. The study's purported "peak" time of 9 p.m. is not the true peak time; there are numerous "peaks", and they vary from day to day. Any "study" that avoids these daily realities is inherently compromised.

We therefore request that BZA set aside the dubious conclusions of this deeply flawed and biased study.

The Demands of One Lender and One Developer Do Not Outweigh the Needs of Current Residents

The developer testified at the recent ANC hearing that she would like to develop the property with the existing parking restrictions in place, except she is simply unable to do so because those restrictions have supposedly made it impossible for her to obtain financing. But upon being questioned, she disclosed that she has attempted to obtain financing from only ONE lender. Our suggestion, then, is that she should do what we all must do when we have an uncooperative lender: look for an alternative lender who will offer acceptable terms. And we know those lenders are out there, because similar BZA restrictions on other properties in the District of Columbia have not prevented those property owners from obtaining the financing they need in order to develop their properties. If this developer does the same, she will have the same happy outcome that those developers have had: a win-win all around.

But as the request stands, this is actually a request that the BZA cave in to the demands of this one lender. We therefore request that the BZA continue to give primacy to residents and maintain the current parking restrictions, rather than strike down those restrictions in favor of this lender.

Relief From Parking Restrictions Not Necessary for Development

Beyond this study, and most importantly, the relief requested by the developer is not truly necessary in order to develop the property. As many residents in the neighborhood have already found, the frustrations of finding parking can make car ownership more trouble than it is worth, especially when there are the following alternative transportation options located within the same area as the parking study: a Metro station, six bus lines, three Bikeshare stations, and nine carshare sites operated by four different companies, as well as taxis and the availability of the popular rideshare programs Uber and Split. The future for living car-free in the District of Columbia – and on Ridge Street – is bright. On July 13, the Washington Post published an article entitled "In D.C., Car Ownership Is Becoming So Yesteryear." It began with these words: "The nation's capital is morphing into a transit paradise for millennials with an aversion to having a car payment." We agree with the BZA that these transportation alternatives are beneficial to all the residents of the District of Columbia. We therefore urge the BZA to continue its sound policy of joining other cities in encouraging the flowering of these creative alternatives, on Ridge

Street and everywhere, when giving consideration to requests that its decisions be overturned.

While many residents have had to give up on car ownership due to the lack of parking options, there are also long-established residents who are directly dependent upon their cars for their livelihood. During the real “peak” times, they are forced to troll the neighboring streets for blocks around in search of parking. One such resident has been forced to spend thousands of dollars to create a parking space in the backyard; other residents do not even have this option, because they do not have an alley-accessible backyard. Their concerns possess a special urgency. To lift the existing compromise parking restrictions on the subject property will only add to their misery and burden them economically.

Conclusion

The developer was aware of restrictions on the property when she acquired it. In January 2015, in response to her request for relief, the BZA granted a compromise. We residents find that January compromise fair and acceptable to all concerned.

As we cannot afford expensive legal representation, we hope the BZA will stand by its previous action, and allow the developer to proceed with her plans to develop this long-neglected property with the existing parking restrictions still in place.

With thanks to the BZA for their consideration,

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