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December 15, 2015

Ms. Sara B. Bardin, Director
D.C. Office of Zoning
Board of Zoning Adjustment
441 4th Street, N.W.
Room 210
Washington, D.C. 20001

SUBJECT: Opposition to BZA Case No. 19133: Application of J. River, 1772 Church Street and St. Thomas's Episcopal Parish

The Dupont Circle Citizen Association (DCCA) is one of the oldest citizens associations in the District of Columbia, founded in 1922 to protect and promote the interests of residents within its boundaries, as well as to do charitable works, provide civic education, and to represent its members to the government, the public and others. Membership is open to all.

Our membership is about 220 members at this time, many of whom have written to the BZA in opposition to this variance. We have ten members who live on this same block of Church Street where the St. Thomas Church is located. Many houses on Church Street have been featured on the Annual Dupont Circle House Tour over its 48 years. DCCA awarded a multiyear grant to the renovation of the Keegan Theatre on Church Street.

In 2014, our members passed a resolution asking for the city to look into buying the land that had been offered for sale in an effort to save some land as parkland. The Dupont Circle neighborhood is deficient in accessible park space per resident according to DC Parks and Recreation Master Plan guidelines. The master plan indicates that a land purchase should be considered when possible. Our Ward Two Councilmember Jack Evans convened a meeting of parties wherein this possibility was raised but rejected by St. Thomas's pastor. Councilmember Evans also consulted with the City Administrator at that time but they could not find a way forward financially on such short notice..

The 1700 block of Church Street is cherished for its low-rise, nearly intact historic fabric. The original St. Thomas Church is the only missing element, tragically destroyed by fire. Over the years since the fire, St. Thomas had generously allowed its grounds, now a beautiful "ruin," to be used as a park. In 2000, DCCA contributed along with others to a relandscaping of the park.

In recent years, when the Church decided to rebuild, it received undivided support for that prospect, including for a design that apparently was not financially feasible. Neighbors were shocked when a plan to sell 2/3 of the land for large residential development and to build a church on the remaining portion was announced, in quite unneighborly fashion, after a contract had already been entered into with a developer and with church's lawyers declaring this was "matter of right."

The neighbors, to whom the church had looked for support of rebuilding in the past, and who had been supportive, were dismissed without consultation. That is how the plan before got here. Today we are here to keep a terrible project from being even worse.

We concur with the Church Street Neighbors group (CSN), the Dupont Circle Advisory Neighborhood Commission (ANC2B) and Ward Two Councilmember Jack Evans that the proposed plan does not meet the three prong test for a variance to allow an increase in lot size, for all the reasons they have provided.

We find our established, protected historic district under threat at every turn, from the encroachment of downtown, from transit oriented development which we are fortunate to have benefited from early on as major stop on the red line metro, and from constant round of liquor license applications. We hope the BZA will see fit to uphold the protections we believe are provided by law.

Thank you for considering this matter.

Respectfully submitted,

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