

December 14, 2015

Dear Members of the Board of Zoning Adjustment:

As a member of St. Thomas' Episcopal Parish, I am writing to urge you to support the St. Thomas' building project by approving the proposed variance application before you. I have been a member of St. Thomas' and a resident of this city for 23 years. I am also an elected member of The Episcopal Church's Executive Council which is the international board of directors for the denomination.

My experience with this project, for far longer than I could have ever imagined, leads me to believe that the construction of residential units adjacent to a new sanctuary building is the only feasible way St. Thomas' can continue its mission and worship in the current location. I am deeply concerned that preventing our parish from moving forward with this variance application would have a chilling effect not only on houses of worship here in Washington, DC but it would continue a pattern that in my position as a church leader, I see happening around the country.

As you are aware, our parish church was burned by arsonists in the early 1970s. The only part of the structure that remained was the Parish Hall that was behind the church building. We are a group of progressive Christians who have been contributing to our community for over 100 years. In recent history, we gave aid to civil rights protestors and Vietnam war protestors during the 1960s.

In the 1970s, the parish pieced itself back together from the violence of having our sanctuary space burned to the ground. In the 1980s, we provided a welcoming sanctuary to Dupont Circle's GLBTQ community. Our Parish provided funerals to AIDS victims when no church would provide funerals during the early, scary days of the epidemic. In the 1990s, we continued to grow providing space for Alcoholics Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous and other 12-step weekly meetings.

Today, we are Parish full of young families, millennials, Generation X, baby boomers, and the greatest generation. We are a mix of races and sexualities. The whole array of District residents. And not to be forgotten, we share our space with a very small but growing Korean Presbyterian church.

**To rebuild our church, we could have abandoned our land to the highest bidder.** We would have moved to another location or merged with a nearby Episcopal church with very lucrative proceeds. The whole land parcel would likely have been condos or who knows what.

Instead, we have chosen to continue to serve the Dupont Circle community and the District at large.

We urge you to support the zoning variance after this long haul to restoration of our building since the 1970s.

We want to help 17th Street NW re-vitalize and be a beacon of grace and love of welcoming, progressive Christianity in a world full of hateful rhetoric, violence, and despair.

Help us on our journey to restoration and support our variance.

Best regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John B. Johnson", with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

John B. Johnson  
413 I Street, SE  
Washington, DC 20003