

Dear Mayor Bowser,

I am writing you in response to Councilman Evan's December 8 press release opposing the variance for the St. Thomas Church Development, and would like to speak in favor of the development and ask you to act in favor of this development as well.

As a former resident of ANC 2B, I see no reason why this development is out of context of the Dupont historic district, or of a massing that is not compatible with adjacent structures that are all well above the height both the residential building and the church building are seeking. As a registered architect in DC, I also know that variances of this nature are very commonplace and rarely seen with such staunch opposition.

Having attended the ANC meetings and other public hearings over the course of this project it is clear to me that the neighbors of Church street are not concerned with the historic nature of the remains of the former St. Thomas parish hall that burned down in 1970. Their worries about the loss of use of a park which was an in kind gift to the community from St. Thomas following the fire are not genuine. Having attended those meetings it is clear to me that the true concern of the neighbors is one of a "not in my backyard" (NIMBY) mindset. The neighbors - residents of Washington DC - are frightened by density. In our nation's capital, a city praised and distinguished for its walkability, diverse transit options, and other amenities that are a result of smart and compact development - these neighbors fear the thing that is a great attribute to this city's success - density.

This project would bring no harm to the neighborhood or city in which it is sited. The park, a space rarely used beyond one for pets to relieve themselves in, is a loss of nothing more than underutilized open space. The residential portion of this project will bring additional housing to a city that desperately needs it.

Ms. Mayor, I understand the concerns around the history of the building that once stood on the current park at St. Thomas - but as an architect I would say there is very little of historic significance that is left on the site, that also isn't decaying with lack of funds for proper care. Over 90% of what was the historic St. Thomas church was lost to that fire. Current plans address maintaining the remaining historic facades and incorporating ruins into the church building.

Mayor Bowser, I ask you to consider acting in favor of this development and to support a development that fits within the context of it's neighborhood and to support a church which has supported its community for nearly 125 years.

Thank you for your time and leadership.
Sincerely,
Tyler Ashworth

