STATEMENT IN SUPPORT OF BZA APPLICATION #16616

Owner:	Clay and Alisa Sell
Address:	500 "A" Street, SE: square 841, lot 804
Lot size:	1,138 square feet
Footprint of existing structure:	837 square feet
Footprint of proposed structure with both existing structure and addition:	980 square feet

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OFFICE OF ZONING
DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

This is a two story owner occupied single family residence in an R-4 zone. It is a corner row house, constructed over 150 years ago, well before the enactment of the current Zoning Regulations. The allowable percent of lot occupancy is 60%. The structure currently covers 73% of the lot, and consequently already exceeds the allowable minimum percent of lot occupancy and cannot receive an addition according to a strict application of the Zoning Regulations, according to Article 2001.3. The addition will also extend the already non-conforming too narrow depth of the rear yard, according to Article 404.

The existing structure is two stories high and two rooms deep, with ½ of a third room on the first floor. This is an extremely small size for any house in this area or elsewhere. Most row houses are three rooms deep, and if they are two rooms deep, they are compensated by being three stories high. There are a small number of row houses in this neighborhood which are only two rooms deep and two stories high. However, virtually all of these extremely small row houses are on interior lots whose size permits a significant rear addition, unlike the subject property.

The subject lot is half the size of a normal lot, as can be seen from a property map of the area. This typical "scrunching" of the corner lot in this district was done so that walls of houses facing the two perpendicular streets could both present a solid front face to the streets. If the typical end row house were not treated in this manner and if its property were the same size as the interior properties, then the street perpendicular to the row houses, the cross street, would be fronted by the party wall and a side view of the side yard of the end row house, a distinctly less pleasing urban solution.

When this neighborhood was planned and constructed in the late nineteenth century, the planners made sure that this would not happen and that all the streets were properly fronted by the fronts of row houses. This meant that at the corners, the houses faced in two directions and had a small or non existent side yard, so that both streets would be properly defined. This resulted in the "scrunching" of the corner properties and the construction of a structure large in comparison to its lot on the corner, frequently with a corner tower or bays facing both streets to define the streets. This pattern succeeded in producing a successful urban environment.

BZA
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Exhibit No. 17

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District of Columbia
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EXHIBIT NO.17

The present structure, however, was built at an earlier time than the other houses in the neighborhood. Presumably because the pattern had not yet been established, this house did not fill out the corner as subsequent houses did. Unlike other corner house conditions, this house presented its side yard to the cross street. Because the house was built early as a small two room deep two story structure and because of the subsequent Zoning Regulations, this house neither started as a larger normal corner house nor could be expanded to a normal size. This disrupts and breaks the normal successful pattern of how corner properties were treated in this neighborhood. A survey of all houses within a five block radius, well over 100 corner houses, revealed that this is the only two story two room deep house. All of the other corner houses are substantially larger, as they should be to carry out the kind of urban planning which defines this neighborhood.

Under a strict application of the Zoning Regulations, the configuration of this house on this property makes it impossible to build an addition This has presented the owners with a significant hardship: unlike all other properties in this area, this house is neither normally sized to begin with nor can it be expanded to a normal size. This discriminates against these property owners by preventing them from achieving a normally sized house. It should be noted that the expected rear portion of the subject property's lot has been separated off and used for two additional lots, each one with a structure larger than the existing subject property's structure. In addition, a strict application of the Zoning Regulations prevents the house from fitting into the normal pattern of corner properties in this area.

The solution to both of these problems is to add a third room to the rear of the house and make the rear yard smaller, as proposed by the owners. This solution not only permits the owners to live in a normally sized house, but it conforms to the urban pattern of the area instead of disrupting it. This is the fortunate occasion when both the private benefit and the public benefit coincide. The owners will have a normally sized house and the urban planning of the neighborhood will be improved by being returned to its normal pattern.

As has been noted, corner properties in this area typically have small or nonexistent rear yards. At an interior property, this lack of a rear yard would cramp the neighborhood light and air. But in this pattern of housing, the corner properties are compensated for having smaller yards by being able to take advantage of a front/side yard which sweeps around two sides of the house. This is the case with the subject property.

The requested variance should be granted because:

A. This is an unusually small structure on an unusually small corner lot. This exceptional configuration produces the practical hardship to the owners that they cannot expand their house to the normal minimum size under the current Zoning Regulations.

B. There will be no adverse impact on the neighborhood. The owners have talked at length with the neighbors and will attend both the ANC and the Capitol Hill Restoration Society meetings when this case will be discussed. The proposed addition will, in fact, carry out the original urban design intent of the neighborhood by building

out and filling out the corner.

C. By limiting the percent of lot occupancy, the intention of the Zoning Regulations is to provide open space. As a result of its corner lot location, this property already enjoys the substantial open space of a yard which sweeps around two sides. Consequently, the intention of the Zoning Regulations is not contradicted.