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HISTORIC CIVIL WAR-ERA HOUSE TO BE DEMOLISHED ON H STREET

BP Amoco Corporation Plans to Replace 1860 House With Block-Long Gas Station

Washington 12/17/00 – The BP Amoco Corporation plans to demolish the Timothy Allen House, a historic Civil War-era dwelling and shop built in 1860 by Irish immigrants, and replace it with a block-long gas station. The 140-year old frame structure in the 300-Block of H Street, NE, is one of the last remaining remnants of the mid-nineteenth century immigrant neighborhood called Swampoodle that straddled H Street throughout the blocks directly north of Union Station. BP Amoco's gas station is opposed by Councilmember Sharon Ambrose (Ward 6), the District's Director of Planning, Andrew Altman, numerous residents, and merchants in the long-neglected retail corridor.

The Stanton Park Neighborhood Association (SPNA) attempted to save the building by declaring it a city landmark. The neighborhood surrounding 316 H Street, NE, is north of the existing Capitol Hill Historic District, and although comprised of historic nineteenth century buildings, it does not benefit from any historic protection under the law. SPNA's efforts were supported by the DC Preservation League, the Capitol Hill Restoration Society, and Dr. Richard Longstreth – Chair of George Washington University's historic preservation program.

Although BP Amoco's testimony concluded that the building is historic and would certainly be protected as part of a historic district, the Historic Preservation Review Board (HPRB) decided it is not a city landmark. The staff of the District's Historic Preservation Division (HPD) also deemed the building to have historic merit. The HPRB, in concurrence with HPD's findings that the house is a valuable historic resource, urged BP Amoco not to demolish 316 H Street, NE.

BZA
Case No. 16648
Exhibit No. 73

Board of Zoning Adjustment
District of Columbia
CASE NO.16648
EXHIBIT NO.73

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Dr. Longstreth conducted an independent evaluation of 316 H Street, NE, and concluded: "316 H Street, NE,...stands as a testament to the inception of H Street, NE, as a commercial corridor – one that would eventually stand among the most important in the District outside of downtown. A large corpus of scholarly literature written by many of the brightest historians...drives home the power of vernacular buildings to inform us about not only ordinary people but also about society and culture as a whole. . . the city cannot be interpreted through its monuments alone. Modest buildings give us a necessary perspective on [a] place's history...The vernacular is key to knowing the heart and soul of the community. The most modest buildings in a city are generally the first to disappear from the scene. A property that is of the age and type [as 316 H Street] is now as scarce as it is rich in meaning."

"Residents north and south of the H Street, as well as numerous merchants on the Corridor are strongly opposed to the suburban design currently proposed for the premier gateway to the H Street business district." said Drury Tallant, SPNA Co-Chair. "Valuable commercial real estate 3 blocks from Union Station, and soon to be served by a new Metro station nearby should be targeted for neighborhood-serving retail and business activities, not a gas station."

Planning Director Altman has initiated a revitalization plan for the long-neglected H Street Corridor. He submitted a highly critical 15-page evaluation of BP Amoco's gas station proposal to the District's Board of Zoning Adjustment. In it he concludes: "This [BP Amoco's proposal] is not the type of development appropriate [for H Street's zoning regulations] which is 'designed to provide facilities for shopping and business needs, housing, and mixed uses.' The applicant proposes demolition of 70% of Square 776 and the entire H Street frontage for their development. A development this large...should be incorporating a mix of uses including office and residential uses. A mix of uses is required for stability, livability, and security. Development of a large portion of the corridor for a gas station will deprive the neighborhood of space for uses needed to revive the neighborhood."

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