Dr. Leslie Cooper
4109 18th St., NW
Washington, D.C. 20011

16650

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D.C. OFFICE OF ZONING
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Dear Sir/Madam:

I have been a homeowner in Columbia Heights since 1983. It is one of the most convenient neighborhoods in Washington D.C., I have ever lived in. Although we are currently not living in the house but renting it out, it is the intention of my children to return to that house. It is because of our ongoing belief of the potential of that neighborhood that we continue to nurture and care for the property. Over the period of time throughout the years we have watched the community go through various levels of change. It is our sincere hope that this current period of revitalization will finally allow the community top blossom into its full potential as a wonderful section of the city with individuals waiting in line to move into the neighborhood. The community has so much potential I know it is a flower just waiting to bloom.

Over the years we struggled with the city on numerous occasions trying to address the over abundance of Section 8 houses located in the neighborhood that were poorly cared for and monitored by the city. During the period of the early – mid 80's we had a struggling Irving Street Block Association that tried to assist with some of the overall goals of the larger community based organizations through the Advisory Neighborhood associations. Our neighborhood was being run over with the rat infestation and the improper disposal of trash. This was a block with a youth facility, section 8 homes, and Senior Citizens homes. There are currently four social service projects/activities operating all within this one block of Irving Street, North West. We had both drug activity and prostitution actively taking place in front of our children's eyes. There were cultural crisis taking place without the city intervening to help address some major problems of acculturation and change. Yet we had some neighbors that were full of hope and that had a vision. A vision of change and prosperity not only for the 1300 Block of Irving Street but also for Columbia Heights and the District of Columbia. Many of my old neighbors are still in the block and the dream seems to be closer to becoming a reality.

The Church of Christ, which sits on the corner of Irving Street and 13th Street, has been there for years. However it has never played an integral part in the neighborhood. Years ago as an active block club we were seeking a place to meet because we had outgrown our homes – we contacted the church to ask to use their facilities and were told a flat out NO. We tried numerous times but to no avail. When we would try to have neighborhood cleanups and encourage individuals to come out and help to clean up. We tried to get the church involved and again they turned us down. We tried setting up a tutorial program and wanted to include the church –NO- they wanted no part of it. We even tried to illicit their thoughts on what they would like to do in the neighborhood to make it a better safer place even for their parishioners to come -- but again they wanted nothing to do with us. The Senior Citizens in the houses they controlled were not properly cared for and just allowed to roam around the streets. Often times they were improperly dressed or just appearing lost. Several neighbors reached out and would buy special things and give to them or help them find their way back home.

The staff that was there seemed not only poorly trained but also not interested in the individuals housed there. Of course that might in part be the result of how the staff wee actually treated by the church and its congregation. We never noticed any real interaction between the church and the seniors housed in their homes. I think very few if any of the seniors wee prepared for and taken over to participate in the church activities. Over the years there have been several fires within those homes (1305 – 1307 Irving Street, NW).

BZA
Case No. 16650
Exhibit No. 41

Board of Zoning Adjustment
District of Columbia
CASE NO.16650
EXHIBIT NO.41

Before the church begins to take on new responsibilities they need first to improve their current level of responsibility as a member in the community, as a member of the 1300 Block of Irving Street, as a member within Columbia Heights. It would be nice for the church to extend itself to complement some of the existing services within Columbia Heights, as well as improving their out reach to the school across the street. Can the church open its doors and provide computer training to the neighbors in the area where it sits? Can the church work with helping to provide some outreach services of its congregation in helping some of the Senior Citizens in the neighborhood where it sits? Can the church come up with a strategic plan on what it would like to do as being a part of the community and what it has to offer? Can the church meet with others in the neighborhood and develop a plan together???

I would like to see the Church of Christ become involved in Columbia Heights and its immediate neighbors. I am not in favor of allowing the church to open another CBRF, residential center or youth center on a block that is already over-saturated with social service programs.

Sincerely,

Leslie Cooper

Homeowner – 1344 Irving Street, NW - Washington, DC 20010