Kajiwara, Gallagher & Paine Design Studio

1742 N Street NW, Washington DC, Tel: 202-822-2102, Fax: 202-822-2104, email:mail@kgpds.com

16721

June 15, 2001

Members, Board of Zoning Adjustment
441 4th Street, NW,
Washington, DC 20001

Board Members,

While there is no denying that the origins of zoning principles were well intended and that it very often provides a necessary good public service, there are instances in which, I feel, it provides a burden to architectural projects that may prove to be of benefit to the built environment. The following is an example of just such a case.

This particular project involves a small one story garage structure located on an individual lot of land facing the alleyway know as Brown Court, behind the 600 block of A Street South East (RE: BZA Application No. 16721). The client's wish, our design proposal, is for a second story addition that would serve as a studio apartment unit. Although it sounds rather simple, zoning regulations regarding this site will not allow the project as a matter of right. Therefore a variance application process is required. In order to succeed in this course, it must be proven that the zoning laws produce a significant hardship for the property in question and that the proposal will not have a negative impact on its surroundings.

Due to the nature of variance requests, the project receives a certain degree of public notice. The responses are both in support and in opposition to the request. The opposition stems from the opinion that the hardship is not significant enough and there will be adverse impacts, including increased density and parking problems. I would like to address the opposition responses and take this opportunity to elaborate on our design philosophy as it relates to this type of problem within the city as a whole.

As an architectural professional- a project manager for this proposal- I always consider the work as a matter of process rather than solitary, static results. The question that I must answer in every project is, "Will this be a better 'place' than before." "Place-making" as a process is the core of my architectural concerns. Therefore, it is necessary to note the larger issues- the big picture- with regards to this project.

First, I must ask to whom the question of hardship, and equally adverse impact, applies. Surely, in an urban context, it is not just for the client. Community value, in my opinion, surpasses property value. Second, the project must be seen as an element which is only a small part of a much larger dynamic- the city- which, whether we accept it or not, is in constant flux. The city, through each and every activity of this type, may choose to encourage improvement or choose to encourage decline.

One of the issues of great struggle that this city, and other cities undergoing a sort of "renaissance," contend with is how to avoid polarization of uses and accessibility. A current debate, championed by Mayor Williams's office, is over the need to maintain a diverse scale of residential opportunity, both for sale and rent, at all economic levels. As time goes on, this issue will only become more dire if in fact the city chooses to "improve," and thereby encourages an increase in the number of those people desiring to live, work, and play in it. It is my opinion that this is the proper direction for the city. I believe we all know the result of the opposite direction and the attitudes in support of that direction.

BZA
Case No. 16721
Exhibit No. 26

Board of Zoning Adjustment
District of Columbia
CASE NO.16721
EXHIBIT NO.26

Alleys, such as Brown Court, are an excellent opportunity for the provision of a housing type that is rapidly becoming harder to find. This potential extends beyond just this particular case. Therefore the precedent set by the decision from the Board of Zoning Adjustment may encourage or discourage similar investigations in other parts of the city. I feel that it would be wise for the city, and it's inhabitants, to actively encourage creative, inventive, and progressive use of such spaces. This project may provide another contribution to the need for smaller scale, affordable, rental property- a contribution to balance. In its current state, as a garage, it provides no such potential to contribute to the community in such a way.

Those with opposing views often site the issue of density as a reason to reject the proposal. These arguments, unfortunately, are almost always wrongly confused with the issue of crowding. Admittedly it is a difficult separation for most people to make. But once again, if we accept the notion that more people returning to the city is a good thing, dodging creative solutions by fearing density is not wise. It is projects like this one- small and randomly placed throughout the city fabric- that increases density but in fact decrease crowding. Spreading out the responsibility for reasonable, scalable, and easily adaptable solutions encourages density balance along with a fine grain of uses and prices. To continue such a process does much to relieve the burden on other locales and the city administration- not to mention the public funds- to deal with crowding concentrations. Allowing wide spread solutions provided by individuals is an advisable course to consider.

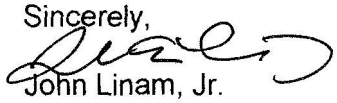
Another opposition stems from parking concerns. To this, I can only say that once again the city has a critical and fundamental choice to make. That is, if growth continues, the primary focus of design and planning decisions can be on cars- or it can be on people, parks, and good buildings, along with progressive transportation alternatives. Unfortunately the two choices can't always be shared. Therefore the need to encourage mass transit and pedestrian alternatives is critical. This project addresses this issue in two ways. First it provides off street parking to be shared by the residents and the owners of the house directly behind it on A Street. Second, the safety of pedestrian spaces is often related to the level of lighting, public activity, and views from homes and offices- in other words, the number of "eyes on the street" can have a major impact on crime. As a garage only, this structure does very little to contribute to such safety. As a place for life activity, it contributes much more.

The last opposing viewpoint is the most difficult to discuss with fairness, but is nonetheless critical. Discouraging a diversity of use and levels of affordability often accompanies a general resistance to change- to any change at any cost. It is for this position that the current zoning regulations may unfortunately be used as an inadvertent instrument of conscious and unconscious racial and/ or economic segregation. It is rather painful to raise such a point but one that may not be ignored.

So with all of this it seems that the questions of hardship and adverse impact become somewhat reversed. Rather than viewing just the small scale results, what impact or hardships might the zoning produce by discouraging solutions such as this in light of the direction of the current urban dynamic?

Washington DC and Brown Court will not stand still. We choose to engage a project that encourages movement in a good direction. Thank you for your consideration of this matter.

Sincerely,



John Linam, Jr.

KGP Design Studio

Cc: Mr. And Mrs. Gordon and Carla Bremer, Project Client
Mayor Anthony Williams

Kajiwara, Gallagher & Paine Design Studio
1742 N Street NW, Washington DC, Tel: 202-822-2102, Fax: 202-8222104, email mail@kgpds.com

March 5, 2001

Board Of Zoning Adjustment
441 4th Street NW
Suite 210
Washington, DC 20001

To Whom It May Concern:

Concerning Lot 833, Square 870, at 633 A Street Rear. The current lot area is 999 square feet. Brown court is a 30 foot wide residential alley. The alleys which lead from Brown court to the surrounding streets are only 15 feet in width. The current percentage of lot occupancy is 62 percent.

Section 2507.2 of the DC Zoning Regulations (July 1995) states that a one family dwelling shall not be erected on an alley lot UNLESS the alley lot abuts an alley 30 feet or more in width and has from the alley access to a street through an alley or alleys not less than 30 feet in width.

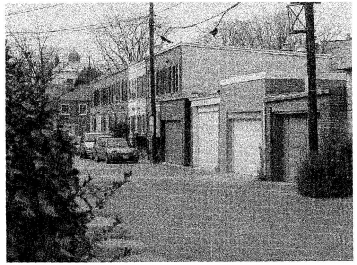
This regulation produces a hardship by not allowing a second story addition to be added to the existing one story structure on this very small size lot. It is evident that other structures on this court have been allowed to erect two story structures that remain within the 30 foot height restriction. Only a few garages remain that do not have additions or have been converted into townhouses.

Therefore, we request that the Board of Zoning Adjustment please allow permission to add a second story to the existing structure, provided that it will also respect the 30 foot height restriction. We feel that this may produce a more useful structure, a more efficient use of the lot, and may provide a more pleasing aesthetic in keeping with the surrounding area. The project will not increase the percentage of lot occupancy beyond it's current condition.

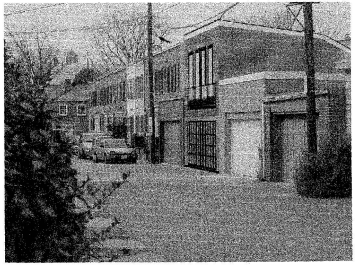
Please see attached diagrams and photos for illustration of this project request.

Thank you for your time and assistance,

William B. Gallagher, Jr., AIA

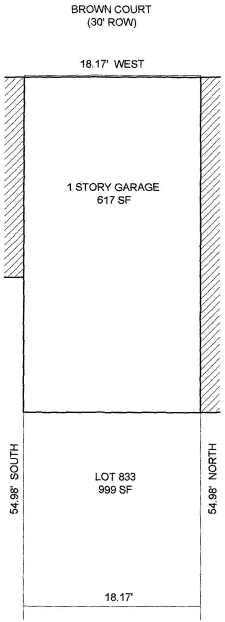


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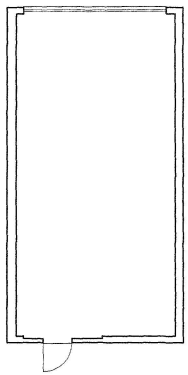


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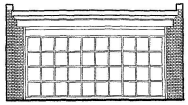
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1742 N ST NW Washington DC 20036 202.822.2102 202.822.2104fax mail@kgpds.com		



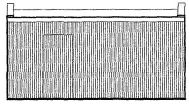
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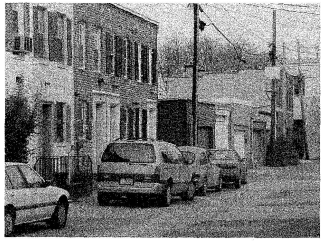
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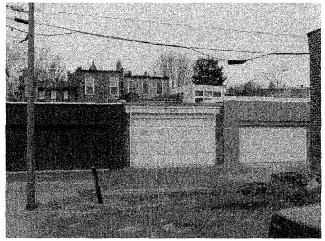
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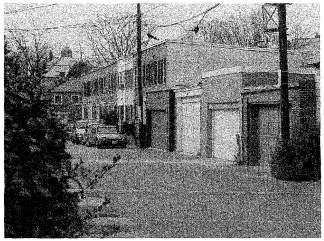
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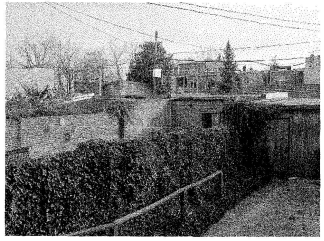
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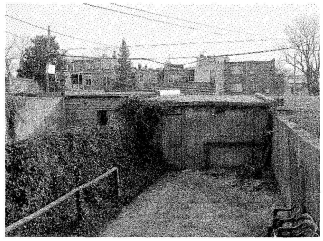
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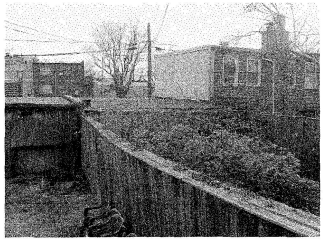
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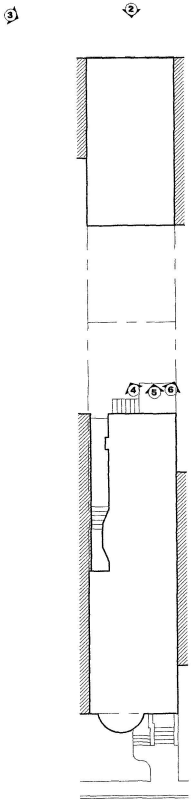
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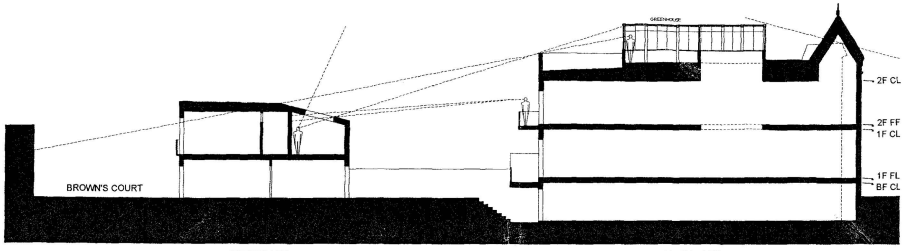


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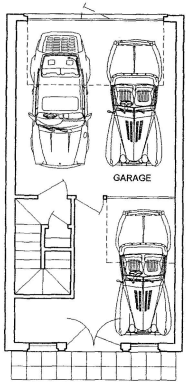


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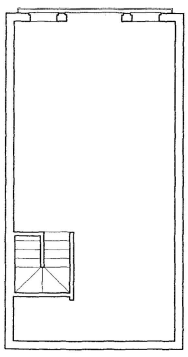
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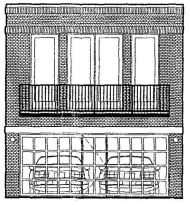
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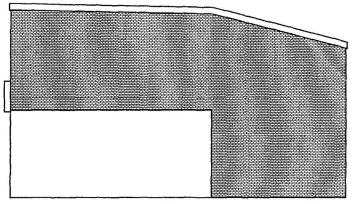
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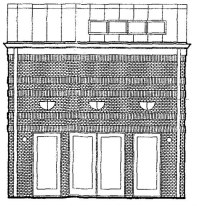
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