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November 7, 2002

Ms. Ellen McCarthy
GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
OFFICE OF PLANNING
801 N. Capitol Street, NW
Washington, D.C. 20001

Re: BZA Application # 16920 (Bass Art Gallery)

Dear Ms. McCarthy:

Thank you for the opportunity to discuss my BZA application by conference call Tuesday. I am writing you to summarize the statements, conclusions and recommendations to which I must take exception, that are a part of the OP memorandum of August 21, 2002 to the Board of Zoning Adjustment.

First , the memorandum states on page 4 that "OP's review is guided by technical criteria . . . ", concluding that "an increase in commercial space negatively impacts the residential character of the neighborhood by the conversion of a predominantly residential building to a predominantly non-residential building." This conclusion is based on the statement that " the proposed addition of the gallery adds another 2,394 square feet of gallery space contributing a total of 3,169.6 square feet of gallery space (58%) in what is currently a predominantly residential building." These figures are incorrect.

Presently, there is a small gallery (the Robert Brown Gallery) that occupies 918 square feet or 16% of the total building area. The area proposed for new gallery use would occupy substantially less than half of the unit which is the subject premises, or approximately 1,200 square feet out of 2,826 square feet. Total area for both the existing and proposed gallery would be approximately 2,826 square feet, which is only 37% of the entire building area of 5,680 square feet.

Furthermore, no displacement or reduction of residential dwelling units is either proposed or contemplated. The second, third and fourth floors of this unit, where the living quarters presently are, will continue to be occupied as a residence. In short, the effect of the application would ***not*** be to convert "a predominantly residential building to a predominantly non-residential building," as alleged on page four of your memorandum. Such conclusion cannot be substantiated either by the change in use of area (sq. ft.) or change in number of units (number of dwellings).

With respect to the concerns articulated regarding the number of gallery events, I respectfully refer you to the Neighborhood Cooperation Agreement, which over sixty-five (65) neighbors have presently signed. I gave a copy to Karen Thomas on November 5.

Contrary to the assertions on page three of the OP Memorandum , there ***are*** adequate accommodations for parking and deliveries. We have two parking spaces and a garage off the

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alley to the side of the building which are designated ***solely*** for this unit. There will be ***no catering***. We have only one delivery per week by van from a framing shop.

Finally, the OP Memorandum states that because a substantial portion of R Street has already been converted to galleries . . .," OP fears that the neighborhood is close to reaching a tipping point, where the residential character will be so eroded it will be destabilized." I believe such fears are unjustified for two reasons:

First, there has actually been a ***significant decline*** in the number of galleries in the immediate vicinity since 1993. During this time, eight galleries have closed (including one-- our immediate neighbor, Ira Pinto at 1621 21st St. – just last week), while only three have opened in place of ones that have closed. Four of the closed galleries have been converted to residences, and the one that has just closed (Ira Pinto) is no longer occupied and the building is for sale. In short, the perception that art galleries are taking over the neighborhood is unfounded; on the contrary, the reality is that the overall trend has been in the opposite direction.

Secondly, there has been a significant increase in the number of dwelling units created within a one block radius over the same period, due to infill development, or redevelopment (conversion) of previously non-residential properties. Net gain in the number of units from this development is at least fifteen (15) dwelling units. The following is a summary of these conversions:

- ***1640 21st St.*** *Formerly a part of the Officer's Service Club; now a two (2) unit condominium.*

- ***1642 21st St.*** *Formerly a part of the Officer's Service Club; now a townhouse condominium with basement unit (2-unit flat) and part of the Gallery Row Condominiums.*

- ***1646 21st St., 2100 R St., 2102 R St., and 2104 R St.*** *Formerly part of the Officer's Service Club and now four (4) condominium townhouses and part of the Gallery Row Condominiums.*

- ***2101 R St., 2103 R St., 2105 R St.*** *Formerly a single residence; now three (3) townhouse dwellings.*

- ***2018 R St.*** *Formerly the Museum of Holography with one dwelling unit above; recently redeveloped into a four-unit apartment building.*

- ***1705 21st St,*** *Formerly a single family dwelling; now a 2-unit flat.*

- ***1717 21st St,*** *Formerly a vacant lot; now a recently constructed townhouse with basement unit (2-unit flat).*

In addition to these fifteen recently created dwelling units, four galleries that closed since 1993 have actually been converted into residences. They are as follows:

- ***2016 R St.*** *Formerly the Baumgartner Galleries; now a single family dwelling.*

- ***2020 R St.*** *Formerly American Yes! Gallery; now a single family dwelling.*

- ***1706 21st St.*** *Formerly Brody's Gallery; now a single family dwelling.*

- ***1727 21st St.*** *Formerly Joanna Tyler Gallery of Contemporary Photography; now a single family dwelling.*

In summary, ***nineteen (19) additional residential dwellings*** have been created in the last decade either from infill development or conversion of non-residential buildings to residential use. Even when *(or if)* the Phillips Collection proceeds with its planned expansion, which might eliminate up to fifteen (15) units from the apartment building at 1618 R Street, there would still remain an ***overall net gain of four residential dwelling units*** within the one block radius of my property.

Together, these facts clearly demonstrate that there has not been any erosion of residential use in the neighborhood as asserted in the OP Memorandum. Rather, residential use has been expanding robustly in this distinctly diverse and mixed use community.

To conclude, contrary to the assertions in the OP Memorandum:

- In terms of square feet and number of units, the proposed application would not convert a predominantly residential building into a predominantly non-residential building.

- The actual number of gallery events and visitors will be significantly less than asserted in the OP Memorandum.

- Adequate provisions for unloading deliveries and parking have been provided.

- The decrease in the actual number of galleries, combined with the increase in residential dwelling units over the last decade, demonstrates that the neighborhood is not "close to reaching the tipping point; where the residential character will be so eroded it will be destabilized."

As a consequence, the conclusion in the OP Memorandum that the proposed use does not meet the standards of "no adverse effects" on the adjoining neighborhood " is unsubstantiated and without merit.

In light of all of the misconceptions that have been raised regarding this application, and those facts that your office may not have been aware of, I respectfully request that the Office of Planning amend its memorandum to the BZA to correct the record.

Sincerely,



William J. Bass AIA
Owner/Applicant

cc: Mr. Geoffrey Griffis - Board of Zoning Adjustment
Attachments