Testimony of Peter M. Crawford on behalf of
The Oakland, A Condominium
Re: BZA Application 17044
Request for Variance to Allow an "Inn/Tourist House"
at 2005 Columbia Road, NW

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Board,

I am Peter M. Crawford of 2006 Columbia Road, NW. I rise this morning on behalf of the Board of Directors and Unit Owners of The Oakland, a Condominium, in opposition to the request for variance. I speak this morning not only as a Director of the Condominium and a Unit Owner, but also as member of the community whose family has lived in this distinctly residential neighborhood over the past three generations. I'd like to thank the Board for granting The Oakland Condominium "party status."

Location Relative to the Subject Property and Other Relevant Facts

- The Oakland Condominium is situated directly across Columbia Road, approximately 60 feet from the entrance and eastern exposure of the subject property.
- Most of The Oakland's 25 units are owner-occupied. Our residents include established families with small children, working adults, and several retirees and elderly citizens.
- Ten of The Oakland's 25 apartments face 2005 Columbia Road and have direct visual exposure and significant audible noise exposure to the referenced property. The other 15 units all have indirect but still significant audible noise exposure to the subject property.
- The north end of The Oakland is flanked by an alley off Columbia Road that provides vehicular and pedestrian access to The Adams Elementary School and parking and services access for the Schuyler Arms condominium, The Oakland, and The Wyoming condominium.

Adverse Impacts Associated With the Requested Variance
The Oakland Condominium concurs with and endorses the conclusions and concerns presented by the Advisory Neighborhood Commission 1C, by the Kalorama Citizens Association, and by the District of Columbia Office of Planning, specifically that:

(1) The application does not demonstrate the existence of any special circumstances that justify issuance of a zoning variance under the D.C. Code. We see no structural, situational, or economic reasons that would prevent the structure from being rehabilitated to its intended residential use as a single family dwelling or flat.

(2) The intended use as an "inn/tourist home" is not consistent with allowable uses in the R-5-D District. The intended use is a commercial operation which is inappropriate in a residential zone.

(3) When The Oakland, The Wyoming, and The Schuyler Arms were all previously threatened by the proposed expansion of a commercial hotel, this Board wisely determined that the nature of this district is residential and that it should be protected from further incursion by commercial entities. A variance would undermine that determination and risk future commercial incursions.

The Oakland would like to raise two additional concerns:

BZA Case No. 17044 Exhibit No. 39

Pedestrian and Traffic Safety
As you know, Columbia Road is a very busy street. In the 2000 block, there is one eastbound lane, one westbound lane, and a center lane to help facilitate turns east into the Adams School alley and westbound onto 20th Street. There is parking at the curbs on both sides of the street. The subject property has no parking facilities of its own. There is no passenger loading zone in front of the referenced property. To create one would be to further reduce the already severely limited parking available to residents.

Board of Zoning Adjustment
District of Columbia
CASE NO. 17044
EXHIBIT NO. 39

The applicant has stated that the overnight guests of the Inn will be transient tourists, arriving and departing daily. Given the lack of parking, and the distance to the Metro, it is likely that transients with luggage will be arriving and departing by taxicab. Without a passenger loading zone on the west side of the street, taxis picking up and discharging passengers will block traffic in the westbound lane. Delivery trucks and other commercial vehicles servicing the Inn would also block westbound traffic. Westbound traffic will be forced to divert at speed either into the center turns lane or into oncoming eastbound traffic. Recent history shows that the vehicular traffic does not readily slow. In fact, the two signs which were bolted to the street, warning motorists to slow and yield to pedestrians, were repeatedly mowed down by speeding motorists.

We believe the increased taxi and commercial vehicle traffic associated with an Inn/Tourist Home will further impede traffic. Thus, we believe the presence of a commercial Inn/Tourist home of the size and type intended by the applicant in this location would present a safety threat to motorists, pedestrians, residents of The Oakland, and to the prospective guests of the Inn

Significant Audible Noise Impacts

In our block, pedestrian and street noise is particularly audible. Voices, horns, and errant car alarms echo off of the building facades and down the alleys. Noise from the previous enterprise at the subject location was significant and frequently intolerable. Guests arrived and departed at all hours; they camped out on sidewalks and neighboring steps while waiting to gain entry. They occupied outdoor balconies and often played music, or talked late into the night.

In all fairness, the business intended by the applicant cannot be judged solely on the basis of the behavior of the previous establishment. However, this applicant seeks to double the number of permissible rooms and guests. In our view, they have not provided convincing evidence that they will personally occupy the premises or manage their guests. The Oakland believes that our residents will be significantly impacted by significantly increased audible noise – from the horns of cabs early in the morning and late at night; from commercial vehicles serving the premises; by the voices of arriving and departing guests; and by motor vehicle accidents

Mr. Chairman and members of the Board of Zoning Appeals, the directors and unit owners of The Oakland believe that the proposed commercial Inn/Tourist enterprise is improper in the R-5-D zone. We believe that its presence will contribute to further commercialization of this residential neighborhood. We further believe that its presence as planned would exacerbate vehicular and pedestrian noise levels and present a recurrent public safety hazard on a daily basis.

We are sensitive to the good intentions of the applicants and the investment they have made in purchasing this distressed property. We regret that they may inadequately research the zoning law or overlooked performing other prudent due diligence before making their purchase and commencing renovations. We believe that the property can and should be used for the residential purposes allowed by the zoning code. We believe that this property can be profitably restored to its original status as a single family residence or converted to apartment flats or condominiums, and that existing market conditions will provide a fair return on their investment. Indeed, we wish them well.

We join our neighbors, our Area Neighborhood Commission, the Kalorama Citizens Association, and the District of Planning Office in their recommendations that this application for zoning variance be denied.

I appreciate the opportunity to appear before you this morning. I have provided copies of my full testimony for the record.