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February 4, 2004

Government of the District of Columbia
Board of Zoning Adjustment
441 4th Street, NW
Washington, D.C. 20001

REF: Application Number 17115 – Rainbow Lofts

To Whom It May Concern:

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to remark upon the above case pending for hearing on February 17, 2004. Though I plan to attend, I wish to add my comments here for the record.

First and foremost, I sought – and received – clarification from my local Neighborhood Commissioner (Logan Circle 2F), Cary Silverman as well as City Council Constituent Representative, Michele Molotsky as to why a zoning variance was being sought as the renovation is already well underway and a banner is hanging outside the building in question (1445 Church Street, NW) advertising the sale of said apartment/ lofts.

In the context of what has become a cauldron of construction and renovation in the city block bordered between 14th and 15th Streets and P and Church Streets, NW, the twenty-one apartments comprising the Rainbow Loft Condominium are a drop in the bucket when one considers the gluttonous growth in this area. I understand that rather than a garden, two additional parking spaces have been added to Rainbow Lofts and it is this variance that commands a hearing.

Two additional parking spaces will not go very far to alleviate what has become a tiresome burden on the residents of this area and family members who come for a visit – but I am grateful for small favors.

Though too late to make a difference except with future projects, I wish to object to the overall scale and design of the Rainbow Loft Condominium's neighboring structures. These are ugly, eight story apartment blocks that have spread inexorably across the street from Whole Foods Market on P Street, and are sprouting from 14th Street westward until there will be nothing but similarly behemoth, "luxury" loft condominiums, whose rents and selling prices are geared not towards middle-class, working people but to individuals whose earnings bespeak a more privileged class. How many more people – in any category – can this neighborhood support?

BZA
Case No. 17115
Exhibit No. 26

Board of Zoning Adjustment
District of Columbia
CASE NO. 17115
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There is already no available on-street parking; there is a chronic problem with the sewer at Church and 15th Streets; I do my grocery shopping in the suburbs or in Georgetown – for, to compete with the traffic and hordes at the local Whole Foods Market is a trial I avoid.

I am a native Washingtonian, returning to live in the city in 1975. In fact, some of my suburban friends feared visiting me in "the ghetto" when I first moved to my current address. I have seen property values and taxes and insurance rates skyrocket. This is my home; one that my husband and I have carefully restored and nurtured. We believed in our modest contribution to redeeming – not to "gentrify" – the neighborhood. It now seems to have turned on us and is, for all the world, urging us to sell and leave.

Fortunately, there are citizens' groups working to contain the massive growth – to introduce some civility and grace in the design of any further buildings by limiting height and density of planned construction or renovation.

There are empty parcels directly behind my house and our fine, hardworking neighbors who run the garage on Church & 15th Street who are facing certain displacement when this behemoth of development claws its way westward to overtake the last, remaining bit of space in this block. I wish fervently it were not so, but recognize that progress of this sort is inevitable.

Progress, however, should and cannot embody the element of thoughtless, greedy development that has produced "amazing hulk-like" edifices to the south and east. Somehow, with the oversight of its citizens and the Zoning Board, we must return the city's original appeal by scaling down and back instead of emulating the architectural features of a more densely populated metropolis – we are not New York.

Thank you for your kind consideration and for alerting me to the need for oversight.

Respectfully submitted,

Rosemary Macchiavelli DeRosa

Brian G. Kavanagh