STATEMENT IN SUPPORT OF
AN APPLICATION BY ARCH TRAINING CENTER
FOR VARIANCES FROM THE SIDE YARD AND LOT DIMENSION REQUIREMENTS
TO CONSTRUCT A SINGLE-FAMILY DETACHED DWELLING
AT 1528 W STREET, S.E. (SQUARE 5779, LOT 824)

October 21, 2004

I. Nature of Relief Sought

This is the Statement of ARCH Training Center ("ARCH," the "Applicant") in support of an application for variance relief from the lot dimensions and side yard requirements set forth in the Zoning Regulations at 11 DCMR §§ 401 and 405, for the purpose of constructing a single-family detached dwelling on a vacant lot. The requested relief is identified in the Self-Certification Form prepared by the project architect and submitted as part of this application. The subject property is located at 1528 W Street, S.E. (Square 5779, Lot 824) and is zoned R-3.

II. Jurisdiction of the Board of Zoning Adjustment

The Board of Zoning Adjustment ("BZA") has jurisdiction to grant the relief requested pursuant to § 3103 of the Zoning Regulations.

III. The Applicant

ARCH (Action to Rehabilitate Community Housing) was established in Anacostia in 1986 as a job-training organization with a dual focus on economic development. Now with 53 full-time employees, ARCH is able to serve hundreds of Southeast residents every year. Over the past 18 years ARCH has developed and sold

BZA
Case No. 17262
Exhibit No. 4

Board of Zoning Adjustment
District of Columbia
CASE NO. 17262
EXHIBIT NO. 4

112 below-market residential units and trained thousands of adults in academics and vocational skills.

ARCH's mission is to maintain a structured environment where at-risk individuals receive access to the tools, education, and resources needed to ensure independence and security by providing assessment, job training, career development, up-to-date technology, and personal counseling. This mission is focused primarily in Ward 8, east of the Anacostia River, ensuring individuals and families access to quality education, livable wage jobs, cultural activities, affordable housing, neighborhood businesses, effective health and social services; while supporting the successful transition to a life-long journey of education, self-sufficiency, and community awareness.

The Founding purpose was to address the following problems in Ward 8:

- High unemployment rate for youth and adults.
- Low educational level of residents.
- No existing vocational training programs.
- Lack of affordable housing for low-income residents.
- Lack of support for local businesses.

At its new (2003) training center in the historic Woolworth Building, facilities on the top floor offer academic classrooms, computer classrooms and computer labs with high-speed Internet access. On the lower level, the training center has locker areas, large lunchrooms, the skills lab, a lecture room and offices for teachers, counselors and caseworkers. Next door to the school is ARCH's Career Services Department and Executive offices, along with a small computer lab for students working with ARCH's Job Developers – for a total of 20,000 square feet utilized for academics, training, counseling and career development.

YouthBuild is the program that will construct the proposed house at 1528 W Street, S.E. This program is a comprehensive 10 – 16 month program in which unemployed or under-employed individuals age 16 – 24 build or rehabilitate housing for low to moderate-income level individuals and families. While participating in the program, students receive academic enhancement education, construction skills training, community leadership preparation and guidance/career counseling.

YouthBuild students learn construction skills in a practical setting, rehabilitating and building housing in their own community. They are exposed to many aspects of construction and related career opportunities, including carpentry, plumbing, electrical, project management and site supervision. In addition, the students volunteer once a month for community service projects that enhance the usage or beauty of public space in Southeast DC.

Other YouthBuild activities include:

- Academic classes for 50% of the students' time at ARCH, giving them the ability to receive a GED, learn or enhance their computer skills, and increase their exposure to culture and knowledge.
- Leadership Development in which YouthBuild students participate in their own governance and extend that participation into the community.
- One-on-one and group/peer counseling sessions to discuss life-planning processes to help the individual overcome hurdles, understand and accept past injures, defeat negative behavior and attitudes and pursue achievable goals towards a productive life.
- Career Counseling in on-going education and apprenticeships, placement in full-time livable wage jobs and encouragement to fulfill future aspirations.

Many of ARCH's students have gone on to college or continued in trade schools. In February 1999, ARCH was one of the first five YouthBuild programs in the country to pass a rigorous program audit to become certified as a full YouthBuild USA Affiliate. Since its YouthBuild Program began, ARCH has served more than 450 youth, aged 16 to

24. According to the program audit, 84% of the participants who graduated from ARCH YouthBuild were either placed in jobs or fulfilled their individual service strategy (i.e., placed in jobs, institutions of higher education or apprenticeships).

ARCH has always encouraged the exposure of its clients – young and old – to the world outside of Southeast Washington. With that same principle in mind, ARCH aims to help other Washington residents to understand the culture and needs in Southeast.

III. The Neighborhood Context

The lot is located within the Anacostia Historic District, which was added to the D.C. Inventory of Historic Sites in 1973 and listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1978. The historic district includes approximately 550 buildings in the area roughly bounded by Martin Luther King Jr. Avenue on the west, Good Hope Road on the north, Fendall Street at the rear of Frederick Douglas House on the east, and Bangor Street at Morris Road on the south.

Anacostia was one of the city's first suburbs, incorporated in 1854 as Uniontown and later expanded. It was initially a working class community housing primarily employees of the Navy Yard. The oldest houses in the neighborhood are detached or semi-detached frame houses with front porches and Italianate detail. Later development included brick row dwellings and 20th-century commercial buildings on two business streets. The Frederick Douglas National Historic Site ("Cedar Hill") is located at 14th and W Streets, S.E.

The immediate vicinity of the subject property in this application includes several types of residential buildings.[1] The houses on the north frontage of the 1500 block of W Street are predominantly detached houses on deep, narrow lots, similar to the subject property. Square 5779 is also improved with some semi-detached houses and garden apartments. Development on surrounding blocks includes detached, semi-detached and row dwellings, as well as small apartment buildings. Frederick Douglas House and Our Lady of Perpetual Help School are each a block or two away to the east of the subject site. The Good Hope Road commercial strip is three blocks away to the north.

The "Neighborhood Context Map" shows the house that formerly occupied the lot. It was similar in size to the nearby houses to the west, and like the others, was sited very near the west lot line.

IV. The Project

This application requests approval to construct a single-family detached dwelling on a vacant corner lot at 16th and W Streets, S.E. This lot is vacant because of an unfortunate sequence of events. The former house on the site, which had been vacant for several years, suffered severe water damage after a vehicle struck the fire hydrant immediately adjacent to the house on W Street. For two weeks, the broken hydrant went unreported and water flowed into the house, and the house was structurally weakened. The District of Columbia deemed the house a hazard and had the property demolished. ARCH acquired the property from the Department of Housing and Community Development ("DHCD") to develop it for homeownership.

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[1] See the "Neighborhood Context Map" in *Exhibit A* and the photographs of the property in the set of Schematic Plans attached in *Exhibit C.*

The Applicant proposes to construct a replacement house on the lot of similar size as the one demolished. The existing garage structure near the alley will be demolished. The new house will have approximately 1,746 square feet of floor area. It will be 25 feet and two stories high in the front and two with mezzanine stories high and 30 feet 2 inches high at the rear. Proposed lot occupancy is 39%. The rear yard setback is 56 feet 9 inches, and the side yards are five feet on the 16th Street side and three feet on the interior side.

The house will have two bedrooms plus a studio with loft, one-and-one-half baths, living room, dining room and kitchen. A roof garden is located over the center section of the house. There is a wrap-around porch with railing on the front and side of the house and a covered rear porch. The exterior materials are Hardi-Plank siding with a middle section of the house in stucco. Energy-efficient windows will be used.

The design is sympathetic to the neighborhood with details and proportions that relate to the other nearby houses on W Street. The Lap siding, colored stucco and tight picket pattern recalls the neighborhood palette. The window and porch covering rhythmically tie the new with the old. The home is designed with modern features that reflect today's understanding of energy, environment and material. The historic preservation staff of the Office of Planning recommended some design adjustments that have been made, and with those changes having been made, the Historic Preservation Division staff is supportive of the proposed design.

V. The Requested Area Variances

The property is zoned R-3, which permits matter-of-right development of single-family residential uses, including detached, semi-detached and row dwellings with a

minimum lot area of 2,000 square feet and a minimum lot width of twenty feet and a maximum height of 40 feet and three stories. For a detached dwelling the minimum lot dimensions are 4,000 square feet and 40 feet in width and maximum lot occupancy is 40 percent. The required yard setbacks are 20 feet for the rear yard and 8 feet for side yards.

The proposed side yards in this case are five (5) feet along 16th Street and three (3) feet on the interior side; therefore an area variance is requested from the 8-foot minimum required for side yards under § 405.1. The existing and proposed lot size is 2,760 square feet and the lot width is 24 feet. Accordingly, a second area variance is requested from the lot area and lot width requirements of § 401.3.

The requested area variances require a demonstration that some exceptional or unique condition of the property creates a practical difficulty for the owner in using or developing the property. The Board must also find (2) that the requested variance can be granted without substantial detriment to the public good and (3) without substantially impairing the purpose and integrity of the zone plan.

A. An exceptional or unique condition creates a practical difficulty in using the property.

The house that occupied the subject lot until its demolition several years ago was constructed in 1905, 15 years before any zoning regulations existed in the District of Columbia. The lot was created at its current size of 24 feet wide and 2,630 square feet in land area.[2] The lot cannot be expanded in size because it is bounded at the rear by a public alley and on two sides by public streets. On the fourth side is an existing detached dwelling at 1526 W Street, S.E. Because the house on the abutting lot is deemed

[2] See the historic subdivision plan attached in *Exhibit B*.

contributing to the character of the historic district, it is highly unlikely that the Historic Preservation Review Board and the Mayor's Agent for Historic Preservation would allow demolition of the house and thus accommodate a potential subdivision and enlargement of the subject lot in this Application. And, of course, the owner of 1526 W Street, S.E. may not be interested in selling the property.

Additional practical difficulties relate to the non-complying side yards proposed. Although § 405.5 provides that a side yard is not required along the side street of a corner lot (16th Street in this case), the property line on the 16th Street side is immediately next to the sidewalk and a limited distance from the curb. The shallow depth of the public area along 16th Street thus constitutes an additional practical difficulty in meeting side yard requirements, along with the historically narrow width of the lot. The five-foot side yard on 16th Street – rather than the zero side yard allowed by regulation – aligns the wall of the house more accurately with other houses along 16th Street.

If the house were to be designed with two side yards of eight feet each, the resulting house would only be eight feet wide and completely impractical and infeasible. The 3-foot side yard on the interior (west) side of the lot is very similar to the side yard provided by the former 1905 house and similar to the adjacent side yard provided by the abutting house at 1526 W Street. The resulting side yard will be similar to the historic condition.

B. The requested relief can be granted without substantial detriment to the public good, and the requested relief can be granted without substantial impairment of the zone plan.

Regarding the public good, it should be noted that the proposed house is very similar in scale and siting to the 1905 house that has been demolished. Thus, the house continues the historic pattern of houses along W Street in keeping with the intent of the historic district. Because of the unique corner lot condition, the architects sought to tie the fronts together by providing a wrap around porch. Not only does the porch marry the two different street fronts together, but it also potentially increases the security of the corner by providing more "eyes on the street."

The only property affected by the requested deviations from lot size and side yards is the abutting neighbor to the west. To minimize any adverse effects on privacy to the neighbor, the Applicant's architect has designed the west façade of the house with few windows. The photographs also show that the historic pattern of houses along W Street is one of detached houses with quite narrow side yards, situated on deep but narrow lots. The neighbor in question has been informed of the possible development and will be kept up to date as these proceedings continue.

The subject property is in the R-3 District – single-family row dwellings – and the pattern of residential areas in the vicinity is a mixture of detached, semi-detached and row dwellings, as well as small garden apartment buildings. The proposed single-family detached dwelling is a use that is permitted as a matter of right and thus consistent with the purpose of the R-3 zone to allow and encourage single-family housing.

Although the development standards for a detached dwelling in this zone require a larger lot and side yards compared with a row dwelling, the proposed house and the adjacent detached houses along W Street are generally the small size and narrow dimensions of row houses, although they are not attached on any side. This is part of the

historic character of the Anacostia historic district, and a complying lot with 8-foot side yards might well be out of place with the historic character of the vicinity. Such a lot would have to be 40 feet wide plus 16 feet for the combined side yards for a total width of 56 feet. This lot would be more than twice the width of the adjacent 9 lots along W Street that are all 24 feet in width. It is also typical of these houses to have extremely deep rear yards together with the narrow side yards. In this regard, the proposed house will share this characteristic of providing more than ample open space at the rear and limited side yard open space.

Based on the foregoing facts and analysis, the Applicant believes that the application complies with the second and third tests for approval of a variance.

VI. Conclusion

The proposed area variances from the minimum lot dimension and side yard requirements are justified based upon the exceptional conditions described herein, which create a practical difficulty. The requested relief can be granted without substantial detriment to the public good and can be granted without substantial impairment of the zone plan. The Applicant requests that the Board approve the application to allow construction of the plans as submitted to the record of the case.

Respectfully submitted,
ARNOLD & PORTER LLP

Nathan W. Gross, AICP

Cynthia A. Giordano

Attachments