

May 5, 2005

Board of Zoning Adjustment
Office of Zoning
441 4th Street, N.W.
Suite 210 South
Washington, D.C. 20001

Attention: Jerrily R. Kress, Director

Subject: Application Number #17319
Square 153, Lot 104
Rear additions to premises at 1723 Riggs Place, N.W.

RECEIVED
D.C. OFFICE OF ZONING
2005 MAY 10 PM 3:53

We are writing to express our opposition to the application of Mr. William McKeever, pursuant to 11 DCMR 3104.1, for a special exception to allow a rear addition to an existing single-family row dwelling under section 223, not meeting the side yard (section 405) and court (section 406) requirements in the DC/R-5-B District at premises 1723 Riggs Place, N.W. (Square 153, Lot 104).

In addition to specifically tactical concerns, we are opposed to Mr. McKeever's expansion plans because they would destroy the original and historic outline of Mr. McKeever's home, and set a precedent for other homeowners to do the same. Mr. McKeever's home, at 1723 Riggs Place, is one of ten adjoining homes that are original in their front and rear exterior designs. These homes were designed and built in 1893-95 by Thomas Franklin Schneider, the famed Washington architect of the period, who also designed and built the Cairo and Iowa condominium buildings, among other beautiful buildings. It is our strongly held belief that both of Mr. McKeever's proposed additions would damage the footprint and architectural integrity of the entire row of homes on the north side of the 1700 block of Riggs place – now, one of the loveliest blocks in the District.

Mr. McKeever purchased the home from us in November 2004 when we moved down the block to 1731. He was aware of the historical architectural significance of the house – and the block – at that time. Indeed on the day of settlement, Mr. McKeever had a representative at the house to review and document the historical façade of the house so that he could immediately make a claim for a tax benefit. Now that he has received that benefit, we find it insincere that he is seeking to change the architectural integrity of the home and detrimentally affect the integrity of the block and the surrounding homes. Had we known of Mr. McKeever's intent, we would have never sold him our home and allowed him to threaten the architectural integrity and historical significance of this unique neighborhood.

BZA

Case No. 17319
Exhibit No. 39

Board of Zoning Adjustment
District of Columbia
CASE NO. 17319
EXHIBIT NO. 39

As many of our neighbors have noted, in 1995, to celebrate the 100th anniversary of these homes, the Historical Society of Washington gave residents of the 1700 block of Riggs Place a lecture about the block. Historical Society representatives explained the significance of the block and its architecture, including the row of ten adjoining homes. Indeed the block was profiled in the *Washington Post* as a tribute to Mr. Schneider, the residents of the block and the city. Making any exterior changes to Mr. McKeever's home – front or rear – would compromise the integrity of his home and those of his neighbors, and thereby damage the historical significance of this block for future generations.

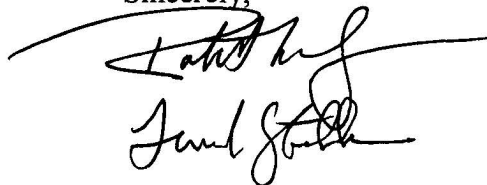
We are also opposed to both of the proposed variances for reasons related to how we as neighbors would be harmed. The third floor addition would deprive the surrounding residences of air and light areas and set a dangerous precedent for expansion into an already congested area of alleyway. In addition, we also fear this would have an adverse impact on security in the alley.

Regarding the expansion of his home over the “dog leg” area to increase his kitchen space by approximately twenty square feet – we are concerned that it too would damage the very architectural integrity of this distinctive row of homes, the front and rear exteriors of which residents for the past 110 years have managed to maintain according to the architect's original design.

This is more than a block – this is a community of neighbors who have lived together and maintained their homes with the utmost respect for the historical heritage that they represent. Mr. McKeever's knowledge of the historical significance of the home and the block, coupled with the strong – almost unanimous – opposition from the surrounding neighbors strongly indicates that his application should be **denied**. As such, we respectfully **request that you not approve Mr. McKeever's application (#17319) for a special exception to allow rear additions to his existing single-family row dwelling.**

It is our intent to be at the hearing next week – to represent ourselves and our neighbors – and we would be happy to address any questions from you at that time.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Robert T. Murphy", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the left.

Robert T. Murphy
Frederick W. Steckler
1731 Riggs Place, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20009

At Riggs Place, Residents Savor 100-Year History

By Angela E. Coulombis
Washington Post Staff Writer

For the last three months, residents of the 1700 block of Riggs Place NW in the District have spilled into the quiet halls of the Martin Luther King Library, poring over maps and land and census records to re-create their block's social and architectural past.

Their efforts culminated this month in a two-hour tour of their one-block strip of 21 row houses near Dupont Circle, a move designed to celebrate the neighborhood's 100th birthday.

"We knew the block's centennial was coming up and we wanted to do something as a neighborhood to celebrate it," said resident Meg Roggensack, who has lived on the 1700 block of Riggs Place for seven years. "It's amazing how much you can find out about your neighborhood just by doing a little digging, and most of us here were really enthusiastic about the project."

Residents contacted the D.C. Historical Society of Washington, where Roggensack and her husband, Mike Janik, are members. Together, they rounded up architect Tom Stohlman, a board member of the Historical Society who has been involved in restoration projects in the District, and former Riggs Place resident Mara Cherkasky, who researched and wrote a spoken history of Dupont Circle as her master's thesis.

They pooled their findings and the history they discovered about their small, tidy block bounded by New Hampshire Avenue and 18th, S and R streets came as a surprise to most, said resident Judy Morris, who has lived on Riggs Place since the early 1970s.

Up until the late 19th century, most of the Dupont Circle area, including the 1700 block of Riggs Place, was countryside with a few industries, primarily slaughterhouses, sprinkled around.

Then in the late 1890s a prominent Washington architect, T. Franklin Schneider, homed in on Riggs Place and designed 13 houses on the block. Schneider is credited with building nearly 1,000 homes and 20 apartment build-



Residents of the 1700 block of Riggs Place enjoy the spring weather. "Neighbors know each other and help each other and work together to make this block a great place to live," says Judy Morris, a resident since the early 1970s.

ings in the District, as well as the 160-foot-tall Cairo Hotel on Q Street NW, which today is a fashionable condominium.

"Architecturally, Riggs Place is a very cohesive block," Stohlman said. "And yet, while most of the homes were designed by the same man, there are small differences here and there that make each house unique in its own way."

Most of the houses on the north side of Riggs Place are built with dark red stone and have marble or brown stone trim.

But that is where the similarity ends and where each house begins to display distinctive traits that reflect Schneider's architectural quirks. There are homes that have Romanesque characteristics, such as round-arched windows, but that also have Victorian elements, such as ornate features on the facades, Stohlman said.

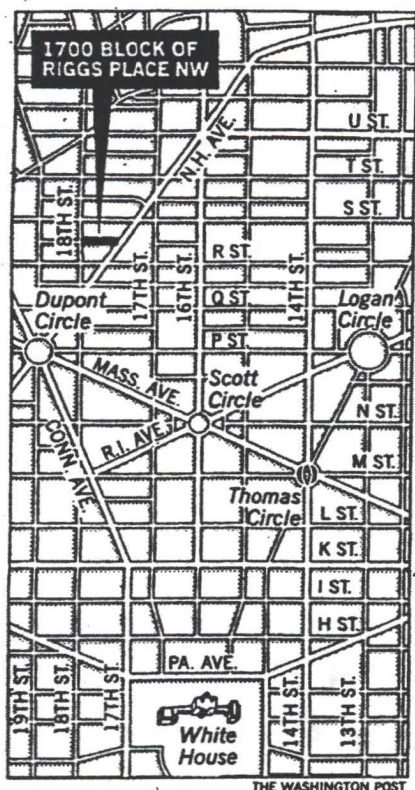
The prices of the houses on Riggs Place range from

\$150,000 to \$250,000, according to information provided by Lusk/TRW Redi, a real estate information service. Because most of the houses are about 100 years old, prices vary depending on how well the structures have been preserved.

At the end of the block, at New Hampshire Avenue, stand two grand, single-family, semi-detached homes built in the early 1900s that give testament to the revival of classical and renaissance influences of the time. According to Stohlman, the houses on New Hampshire were built for the city's affluent families who desired to participate in Washington's turn-of-the-century social scene and who built on main thoroughfares to show off their grand homes.

"So Riggs Place was a sort of fill-in block, with smaller structures which were more affordable," Roggensack said. "It was a middle-class neighborhood that attracted govern-

See RIGGS PLACE, E8, Col. 1



Architectural Distinction on Riggs Place

RIGGS PLACE, From E1

ment employees and merchants who could walk from home to work."

Library archives show that most of the homes had what residents called "domestic quarters," where Riggs Place families housed hired help, said Tom Sams, who moved to the block in 1992.

In the late 1890s the area was racially mixed, Cherkasky said. Black and white workers who held jobs in nearby factories settled in the area. But by 1910 Riggs Place and surrounding streets had become all-white, she said.

In 1920 a black family moved into the 1600 block of S Street, one block away from Riggs. That same year, residents on the 1700 block of S Street drew up a restrictive covenant designed to control the racial character of the neighborhood and got a significant number of residents to sign it into effect. The covenant was taken

"... there are small differences here and there that make each house unique in its own way."

— architect Tom Stohlman

to the Supreme Court in 1926, where it was upheld. The covenant was challenged again in 1948 and this time it was struck down by the court, Cherkasky said.

During World War II, the area experienced rapid turnover. Then, starting in the 1980s, Dupont Circle's property values skyrocketed, rendering the community one of the trendier and more expensive residential neighborhoods in the District.

Riggs Place today attracts people who enjoy living in the center of town, where movies, shops, restaurants, cafés and public transportation are no more than a five-minute walk away, Morris said. And yet, the block has been able to retain a relatively quiet, residential feel.

"On the one hand, living in and around Dupont Circle is like living in New York City," Morris said. "There are always people out on the streets. But we've been spared some of the urban anxieties of living downtown. Our street is quiet, and far enough away from the main strips which draw large crowds and traffic."

When Morris moved to Riggs Place in the mid-1970s the neighborhoods around Dupont Circle had not yet been developed, she said. Rents were much lower and artists and students flocked to the row houses on Riggs Place. The few families that lived on the block had young children, and Riggs Place seemed to be less homogeneous than it is today, Cherkasky added.

Now those same children have grown up and left their parents' homes. And as home prices have risen over the last 10 years, Riggs Place has attracted single professionals who work downtown or couples who have raised their kids elsewhere and are ready to settle back into urban living.

Traffic is not a problem on the street, Sams said. Unlike many of the letter streets around Dupont Circle, Riggs Place has two-way traffic. And because of its location near the Metro station, most residents can do without a car, Sams said. Rarely do stray cars pass through on weekend nights looking for parking spaces.

When the weather is warm residents file out to their front porch steps, tending to their plants, swapping gossip or sharing a bottle of wine. In the spring, the fan-shaped leaves of the ginkgo trees that line the street cast a cool shade on the block, Sams said.

"There are hidden wonders everywhere on this block," Morris said. "Neighbors know each other and help each other and work together to make this block a great place to live. I've never thought of moving any-