

TESTIMONY OF EMILY HOTALING EIG  
BEFORE  
THE BOARD OF ZONING ADJUSTMENT  
BZA CASE 17337 – Request for a special exception at 1743-1755 N Street, N.W.

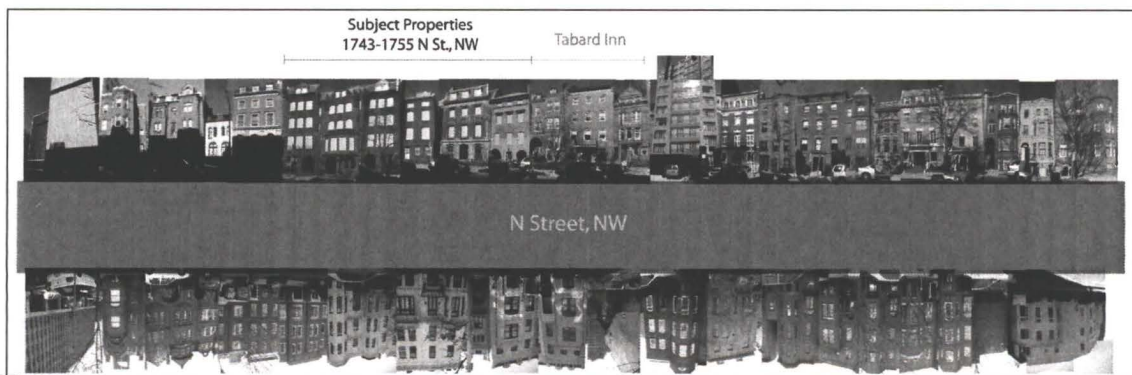
I am Emily Hotaling Eig, Architectural Historian and Preservation Specialist with EHT Traceries, Inc. I also serve as President of the firm.

This testimony is presented in opposition to the request for a special exception at 1743-1755 N Street, N.W. My opposition is based on the harm this proposed project will do to the character of the Dupont Circle Historic District. As proposed, the project is too large, unnecessarily calls for the construction of a multi-story addition that has a footprint that fills the lots to their rear and side property lines, would eliminate open space in a manner inconsistent with the historic character of the Dupont Circle Historic District, and sets a bad model that is harmful to the District's future.

My assessment of the proposed project took into account the specific standards for the Special Exception requested set forth in the 11 DCMR § 512 and the relevant provisions of the Dupont Circle Overlay (11DCMR § 1501).

### Historic Significance

The 1700 Block of N Street is one of the city's most intact collections of historic buildings and considered a key component of the Dupont Circle Historic District.



BOARD OF ZONING ADJUSTMENT  
District of Columbia

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According to the National Register Documentation of the Dupont Circle Historic District:

**"...The 1700 block of N Street,** reflects the breadth of architectural talent working in the area. Among the approximately forty residential structures on the block are houses by [T.F.] Schneider, [Frederic Bennett] Pyle, Frank Harding, Samuel Edmonston, and Waddy B. Wood. With the exception of an apartment building in the middle of the north side of the street, the block remains essentially as it did at the turn of the century. Dominated by Queen Anne and Richardsonian Romanesque Revival style houses, many of which were designed to relate to the National Presbyterian Church which once stood on the corner of 18th and N Streets, this block reflects the character of the historic district as a whole."

*--Dupont Circle Historic District, National Register Nomination, National Park Service, 1978*

The five residential buildings that are part of this project are not the only historic residential buildings that will be affected if this project is constructed. Simply put, the building to the east and that to the west will no longer have the benefit of the contiguous open area of the rear yards of 1743-1755 N Street. Instead, new brick walls will rise at the property lines rising five stories in height.

## **Section 512**

My study finds that the proposed project does not meet the provisions of Section 512, as required for a special exception to the SP-1 District. Specifically, I will address Section 512.3.

### ***512.3 The height, bulk, and design of the hotel or inn shall be in harmony with existing uses and structure on the neighboring property.***

The height, bulk, and design of the proposed project includes a rear section that is higher and bulkier than the historic buildings to which is it attached, with a design that is inconsistent with historical patterns of development.

The existing historic buildings are shown on the applicant's BZA submission drawings as 130.2' above sea level, while the new building is shown as 134.4' feet above sea level. However, the drawings show a penthouse at 144.3' above sea level, 14' higher than the historic, and running nearly the entire 150' width of the five buildings that comprise 1743-1755 N Street. While the 9.9' height of the mechanical penthouse is allowable, the approximately 126' width and resulting bulk of the structure is out of character with the historic appearance of the 1700 Block of N Street. This penthouse is not in harmony with existing uses and structure on the neighboring property.



and too small to provide any effect at all to the immediately adjacent neighbor's rear yard five stories below.

### **Dupont Circle Overlay**

While additions to historic buildings that require the removal of rear ells have been approved by the HPRB, typically the new structures do not completely obliterate the historic open space to the rear of the buildings by filling the entire footprint of their lot. This is particularly true in areas that continue to retain their residential quality. If a decision by HPRB does find for such coverage, the project typically must seek approval from the BZA. The BZA, then, must determine if the proposal meets the required tests. In this case, the zoning regulations provide additional tests---and an extra layer of protection---through the application of the Dupont Circle Overlay.

As stated in the Report of the Office of Planning, the Dupont Circle Overlay was created to ensure that new development is consistent with the scale and character of the area by controlling scale, height, and bulk of structures. The text of the overlay includes five stipulations. I will address the four that relate directly to historic preservation and the historic development patterns of the area: a, b, c, and e.

1501.4 The purposes of the Dupont Circle Overlay District shall be as follows:

***(a) To require a scale of development consistent with the nature and character of the Dupont Circle area in height and bulk; and to ensure a general compatibility in the scale of new buildings with older, low scale buildings by restricting the maximum permitted height and floor area ratio of new buildings to that of the underlying zone;***

The proposed design fails to ensure general compatibility by pushing its height and bulk to the side and rear of the lot, in contradiction to the historic patterns of development in Dupont Circle and, specifically, this special residentially scaled section of the Historic District.

***(b) To protect the integrity of "contributing buildings," as that term is defined by D.C. Law 2-144, the Historic Landmark and Historic District Protection Act of 1978, in the various historic districts within the overlay district; to require compatibility of development with the purposes of D.C. Law 2-144; and to preclude demolitions or partial demolitions which would lead to an increase in height and floor area ratio inappropriate to the area;***

The proposal calls for the demolition of a large portion of the rear ells and infill of the rear yard of the five historic buildings. The resulting space will be used to create a closed court, essentially a five-story, atrium-type space, between the back of the main blocks of the historic buildings and a new addition that is sited in what had been the rear yards of the properties. This approach results in the introduction of a massive five-story block along the back portion of the five lots that turns away from the neighboring buildings and inward open itself. This

massing is distinctly not in character with the massing and siting of the historic buildings that are the basis for the significance and integrity of the district.

The applicant argues that this approach saves the historic buildings—as it calls for the demolition of only part of the buildings. However, according to the applicant’s “modification” drawings, many of the interior walls will be demolished and modifications will be made to the flooring hence, the extent of demolition threatens to destroy the historic integrity of the building. The applicant has not received approval from HPRB and hence, there is no decision for the BZA to look to in this case. Given the extent of demolition, the proposed project would constitute a demolition under the terms of DC Law 2-144, and require approval by the D.C. Mayor’s Agent on Historic Preservation.

***(c) To enhance the residential character of the area by maintaining existing residential uses and controlling the scale, location and density of commercial and residential development;***

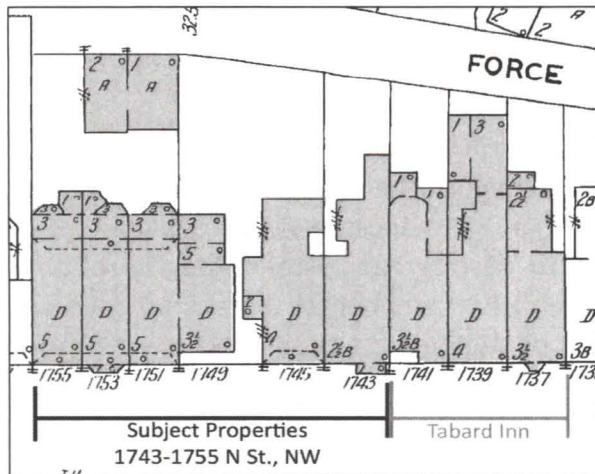
The proposal before you does not enhance the residential character of the area by maintaining existing residential uses, nor does it control scale, location, or density of commercial and residential development in a manner consistent with the area’s character.

***(e) To preserve areas planned as open gardens and backyards and to protect light, air, and the privacy that they provide;***

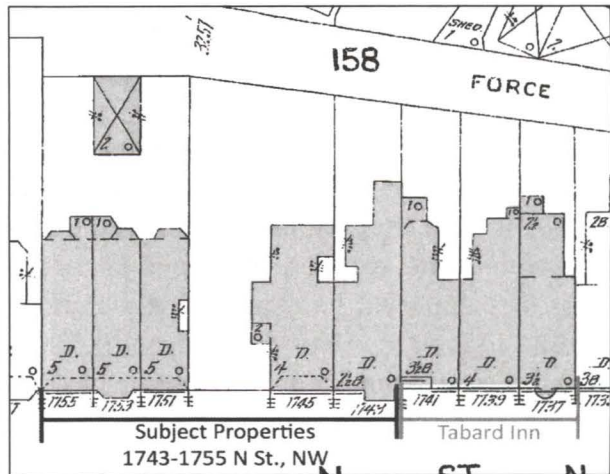
This proposal ignores this stipulation entirely by eliminating areas historically planned and used as open gardens and backyards and the protection of light, air, and privacy that they provide. The proposal’s interpretation of open gardens and backyards as a five-story, atrium-style “closed court” is insulting to the character of the 1700 Block of N Street and the adjacent neighbors.

Historic maps document that the rear yards of the five subject buildings as well as those of the majority of the 1700 Block of N Street featured very few outbuildings, further supporting the position that the infill of the rear yards in this location is not in character with the historic district and not appropriate.

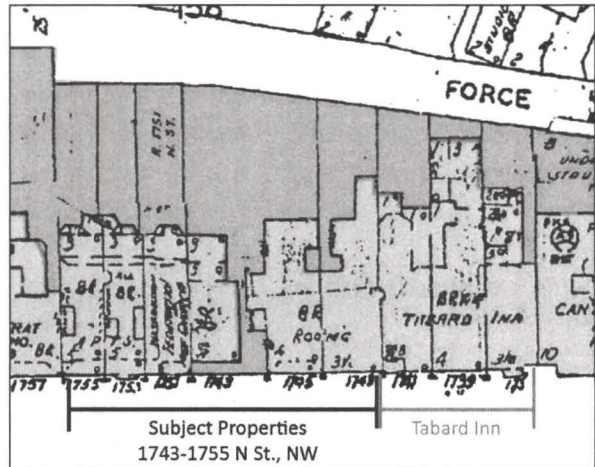
See Maps Below:



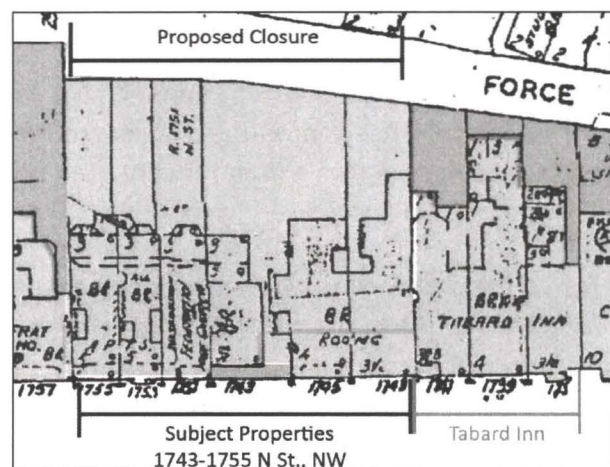
Base map: 1916 Sanborn



Base map: 1928



Base maps: 1999 Sanborn



## Conclusion

This proposal is NOT consistent with the stipulations that call for the protection of the character of the historic district as specifically cited in the 11 DCMR § 512.3, as required for a special exception to the SP-1 District and as stated in the Dupont Circle Overlay.

I urge you to reject this proposal.

Thank you.