

Tabard Inn

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February 15, 2006

Geoffrey Griffis, Chairman
District of Columbia Board of Zoning Adjustment
441 Fourth Street, Second Floor
Washington, DC 20001

BOARD OF ZONING ADJUSTMENT
District of Columbia

Re: BZA Case No. 17737

CASE NO. 17337
EXHIBIT NO. 50

Dear Geoffrey Griffis,

The Office of Planning seriously erred when it recommended a Special Exception for N Street Follies proposed hotel. See article from February 1st, 2006 Northwest Current below.

THE CURRENT

Zoning change would be real N Street folly

VIEWPOINT

JEREMIAH COHEN

At the Board of Zoning Adjustment's Jan. 24 hearing on N Street Follies' proposed hotel in the 1700 block of N Street, D.C. Office of Planning staffer Travis Parker made several admissions about things the office failed to consider in deciding to give its partial support.

Under cross-examination by Richard Nettler, our zoning attorney, Mr. Parker admitted that the Office of Planning:

- made the assumption that Tabard Inn's light and air would not be blocked by the structure.
- did not consider Section 1501.4 (e) of the zoning regulations, which says that the purpose of the Dupont Circle Overlay District shall be "to preserve areas planned as open gardens and backyards and protect the light, air and privacy they provide."
- did not consider either the impact of additional service trucks on the alley or the fact that N Street Follies would be doubling the traffic into the alley, which is 8.5 feet wide at its narrowest and not wide enough for a fire truck to fit through.
- was not aware of anywhere else in the city where there are three hotels on a single block.

All four are serious oversights.

Section 512.4 of the zoning code stipulates that a special exception for a hotel is permissible only if it does not have an adverse impact on neighboring property. The fact is that this project would cut off substantial light and air to the Tabard Inn garden, both of its dining rooms and nearly half of its hotel rooms.

As Mr. Bender testified at the zoning board's Jan. 24 hearing, "Sunlight and air are vital to any hotel." Unfortunately, he was referring only to his hotel and not the Tabard Inn.

Contrary to the spirit of the Dupont overlay, this project would diminish and/or destroy rare historic gardens at Tabard Inn and an adjacent property. Both are clearly assets to Washington, D.C.

Section 512.10 of the regulations says that a special exception for a hotel is permissible only if it does not lead to dangerous or other objectionable traffic conditions. The N Street alley already is a traffic nightmare. And N Street Follies wants to nearly double the traffic into it? And the Office of Planning approves?

Section 512.5 requires the balance of residential, office and hotel or inn uses in a special-purpose zone. Historic N Street already has the 100-room Topaz and 40-room Tabard Inn. It has no residential properties. In fact, N Street has no residential because N Street Follies — led by real estate mogul Morton Bender — spent 10 years evicting all of the residents from 1753-1755 N St. to form his assemblage. It was the only apartment building on the block.

My family has owned and operated the Tabard Inn for 30 years and expects to continue to do so for the next 30 years. We are proud of our business and proud of the Dupont Circle Historic District in which we operate.

We want to see the reuse of the vacant properties on N Street, and we believe we are closer to that goal than ever. However, this is not the right plan for multiple reasons and should not be granted a special exception by the zoning board.

Jeremiah Cohen is an owner of the Tabard Inn.

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