September 12, 2005

From: Patricia D. Roy
819 Randolph St., NW
Washington, DC 20011

To: Commissioners, Board of Zoning Adjustment
441 4th Street NW, Suite 210 South
Washington, DC 20001

RE: CASE NO. 17378

Dear Mr. Griffis:

On June 3, 2005, my neighbor, Mr. Jean Kamdem, who lives at 821 Randolph Street, NW, i.e., the row house adjoining mine, filed a petition in the above-captioned case with the Board of Zoning Adjustment for zoning relief. He is requesting permission to turn his existing row house (a 4-bedroom single-family dwelling) into a single apartment unit, as well as to build a 2-story apartment building comprised of two 2-bedroom apartment units, in the rear, i.e. the back yard, of the existing house.

Because Mr. Kamdem's property abuts my home, I am especially opposed to his petition. In addition, most other affected residential homeowners in this block are opposed to his petition, for the basic reasons outlined below.

1) This is a Single-Member District. Most of us in the affected block are new homeowners either having recently finished extensive renovations, or still in the process of doing so. These renovations have been very costly, and have added significant value to our properties, and to the community in general. At least four of us have fought an ongoing battle to improve and revitalize this neighborhood. We have engaged the help of Councilman Fenty, Officer Hayes, Timothy Jones, as well as the Mayor's office to help make this effort a reality. This area of Petworth is roughly one block off Georgia Avenue. It was greatly affected by the downward spiral in property values caused in part by vacant and abandoned houses, heavy drug traffic and prostitution. We purchased these properties. One neighbor's home was scheduled for demolition when she rescued it, and has significantly improved it and increased its value.

My home specifically was my grandmother's house. I purchased it from her estate because it holds many childhood memories for my family and me. I have invested heavily in bringing it back to life. My back yard is a place that family, friends and neighbors join to celebrate holidays, and in general enjoy a more "neighborly" community. Mr. Kamdem's proposal will obstruct my backyard view, diminish the air flow and impede the quiet enjoyment of my property with the presence of the proposed structure in his back yard. My other new neighbors and I have personally assumed the tasks of cleaning the streets, sweeping up used condoms and drug paraphernalia, especially prior to the regular sweeping that the city now performs only once a week. We initially walked at night in-groups to take down the license numbers of abandoned cars. We walked together to show presence to drug dealers and "johns" dropping off prostitutes.

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EXHIBIT NO. 21

We even made a trip down to District 4 to personally seek assistance in cleaning up this area.

Now, it appears from this petition that Mr. Kamdem minimizes our efforts by once again making this area primarily a rental community. We have a stake in what we have sought to build here. Even at the outset, Mr. Kamdem attempted to erect a large sign in the front of his home to advertise his business, detracting from the residential community we desire. Our block captain and Mr. Jones were instrumental in having this eyesore removed.

2) Mr. Kamdem's petition also erroneously states that parking would not be affected by his "apartment community", and even states that it may actually be helped. This is ludicrous. Because this area is about 1-1/2 blocks from the Georgia Avenue-Petworth Green Line Metro, a lot of persons with Zone 4 stickers drive to this stretch of Randolph Street and park here during the workday, to be closer to the Metro. Furthermore, there are at least three large churches bordering this block. Two are Protestant churches, and one is Seventh Day Adventist. Therefore, on both days of the weekend, church members who park consume this stretch of Randolph Street, and even double park, and spaces near fire hydrants are fair game for persons seeking additional parking. We were informed in a neighborhood meeting by the Police Department representative that no tickets would be issued during the weekend days because the number of cars parked would present a virtual administrative nightmare. Add to this congestion, the fact that Latney's Funeral Home is right at the corner of Randolph and Georgia Avenue, and when there is a funeral, another layer of the very limited parking situation arises. Unless Mr. Kamdem already knows who will inhabit his "apartment community", he cannot state truthfully, or with certainty that the parking situation will not be further adversely affected. As a matter of fact, he has two tenants living in his basement and both have cars.

3) Since Mr. Kamdem moved into his home, he has tended to disregard the best interests of our community-building efforts in several significant ways, most of which violate city codes and ordinances.

a) It appears that Mr. Kamdem is self-employed in home improvement and construction. There have been numerous times that he has left job-site debris (i.e., windows, screens, etc.) on his front porch for weeks at a time, and his back yard has been filled with old radiators, doors, and trash. On June 29, 2005, an individual driving a U.S. Government vehicle came to pick up his trash. The lady of the house, whom I assumed to be Ms. Kamdem, got into an argument with the trucker for not picking up the smaller pieces of trash, at which time the trucker demanded his promised $100. Because I thought there might be an altercation, I captured the incident, including the U.S. Government truck number, on tape.

b) The DCRA requires that any modification to an existing structure be filed with that office and a building permit obtained. Mr. Kamdem erected a retaining wall last year. He installed an air conditioning unit the first week of July 2005. He enclosed the second floor back porch earlier this spring. He broke out the brick from under his porch, dug out the dirt and installed a window and door entrance, converting it into a room. I checked the Permits Service Center Issuance, Suite 2100, at 941 North Capitol St., NW. The records clerk, Ms. Mable Williams, stated that no permits were on file for Mr. Kamdem's address at 821 Randolph Street NW.

c) Mr. Kamdem currently has tenants in his basement, and there is no Landlord Registration Form on file, as required by DCRA.

Mr. Kamdem seems to flaunt the permit system that in part regulates health and safety in the community. There is no reason to believe that he will be compliant in building what essentially sounds like a small shantytown on his property. His petition does not indicate whether he and his family will live in the apartment complex he intends to create, but his motive seems to be profit only, so it is doubtful that he will be conscientious about the numbers and kinds of tenants to whom he rents. Such a motive is not only inconsistent with the work and efforts of the other community residential property owners, it is also inconsistent with the underlying zoning construct for this area as a thriving and regenerating community.

My understanding from reading the zoning code is that in the R-4 zone, an owner can only have two units on one's property. Mr. Kamdem's existing house is one unit. The fact that he rents the basement appears to constitute two units. Permission to build two more apartment units in his back yard creates four units. I do understand the Zoning Board may grant special variances, but the residents of this stretch of Petworth are bitterly and solidly opposed to such a variance. It will reduce our property values, essentially blowing away all the progress we have made. These other homeowners with whom I have spoken include Shirley Gibson, our block captain, Ellen Bigham, and Mark Bush, who live on 8th and Randolph Streets, NW, and with Gertrude Saunders, Bette McFadden, and Brandon Harwick, who live directly across the street from my home and Mr. Kamdem's home on Randolph Street, NW.

A hearing is scheduled on November 8th regarding the disposition of Mr. Kamdem's petition. I know there are good legal arguments on both sides. However, as a hardworking homeowner, and with the support of other homeowners directly affected by the Board's ruling, I respectfully request that you join us in asking the Board to deny Mr. Kamdem's petition.

Thank you. Photographs and other supportive evidence are available upon request for the allegations made in this response.

Sincerely,

Patricia D Roy

Patricia D. Roy

cc: Councilmen Adrian Fenty, Councilmember Ward 4
Mr. Timothy Jones, Single Member District 4C08
Ms. Karen Archer, 4C Advisory Neighborhood Commissioner
Mr. Ken Laden, DC Department of Transportation
Development Review Division, Office of Planning, Ward 4
Mrs. Shirley Gibson, Block Captain