

Christiane Frischmuth
1702 Hobart Street, N.W., Washington, DC 20009
christiane@gfconsulting.org

Marnique Y. Heath, Chairperson
Board of Zoning Adjustment
441 4th Street NW, Suite 200-S
Washington, DC 20001

April 25, 2016

Re: BZA Case 19256

Dear Chairperson Heath and Board Members:

I am owner and resident since 1999 of the house and property at 1702 Hobart St. NW.

I am writing to oppose the zoning variance requested in Case #19256 which would allow a pop-up on top of the two-story house and changes/additions to the rear to be added to the house at 1716 Hobart St. NW.

This opposition was confirmed by the ANC in their 4:1 vote tonight on April 25, 2016 after hearing concerned parties and studying the case.

I understand that 1) a variance is required for any addition to this property because the house, garage and deck together currently occupy 74% of the lot, whereas the maximum allowable lot occupancy in this neighborhood is 60%; 2) the variance may only be issued if the applicant has demonstrated that there are “extraordinary” conditions inherent in the property that present “exceptional practical difficulties;” and 3) the public interest must remain unimpaired.

With respect to point 1), the circumstances cited by the Applicant (steep topography, location in a historic district, presence of a large tree, non-conforming structures) are not unique to the property in question. Rather, these circumstances are common to most of the properties on the south side of Hobart St. (including ours) and much of Mt. Pleasant generally.

With respect to point 2), I understand that the Applicant believes her situation pertaining to the number of people who will be living at 1716 as “extraordinary condition” and pose “exceptional practical difficulties.” There are numerous houses in this block of Hobart Street (1700 Block) including my own house, that have a basement suite (suitable for 2 persons), 4 bedrooms and 2 bathrooms on the second floor and a half bath on the first floor. These are practical and suitable conditions for a family with live-in support, children of all ages and office space for professionals. Skylights can add light to any space. The changes needed are therefore neither extraordinary nor exceptional practical difficulties. They could be addressed through internal changes rather than necessitate external additions.

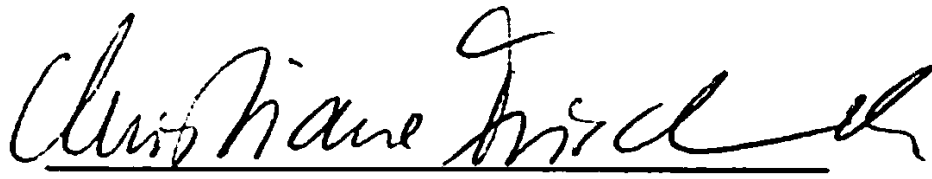
I have also seen any kind of family and any size of family thrive in the 1700 Block of Hobart Street and on all of Hobart Street for that matter. People move in and move out, there is no pattern as to the decisions they make to leave this neighborhood. Most stay for a very long time.

Finally, with respect to point 3), I feel that the public interest is impaired by the introduction of a pop-up – and the precedent it creates – for several reasons:

- a) Mount Pleasant and especially historic Hobart Street is a “village in the city”. By setting a precedent for a trend that changes the look as well as purpose of the houses on this street, the nature and feel of this street will change. Trends catch on quickly. I would not be surprised if more homeowners and developers would split houses into 2 units. Not only would this pose density issues such as parking, noise, trash, alley use etc., it would also change the street into one that has lost its historic village feel. We neighbors keep the historic village alive by adhering to historic rules (not changing the look of our house fronts etc.), we share meals and conversation across unobstructed back porches, we take care of each others’ homes since we have established trust and spent time together and we are proud of our open, peaceful, green views out the back and front. This would be changed with finality, should back and top additions be allowed.
- b) I have noticed that shade would be thrown onto our back decks, neighbors across from 1716 would have more shade as the sun would be blocked esp. in the winter from reaching their front porch, Harvard street neighbors would have impaired privacy and less light, neighbors as far down as my house would be blocked from looking to my neighbors as well as light would be blocked. The neighbors on either side would have privacy issues and light being blocked. I could also imagine that, would this be allowed and become a trend, residents who have been living here for a long time and are keeping the stewardship of this street alive would move away, forever altering the heart and soul of this street – I could see myself being one of them.
- c) People seek out Hobart Street for exactly the reasons I have outlined above. Hobart Street has become an example of admirable and sought-after city living with a strong and caring community feel. People who come to Hobart Street also care for the city and its social and environmental challenges. They are actively engaged in social issues and keeping our city environmentally sustainable. Keeping this historic street and its houses structurally the way they are plays a primary role in keeping and making this street as it is. It would be contrary to Washington DC’s values to let that change.
- d) These concerns are shared by at least 35 neighbors who signed the petition to deny the requested zoning variance. Several are also writing letters to you. This is a significant number of concerned, impacted neighbors who are spending time and care on this issue.
- e) The engineering issues are a great concern of mine. I fear that party walls and adjacent houses would be impacted by a pop up. I fear drainage issues from the rooftops. I can also see litigation, adversity and non-lived in buildings in the future as neighbors learn about impacts from neighbors’ pop-ups that they have to fix at great cost.

For all these reasons, we urge the Board to deny the requested zoning variance.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Christiane Frischmuth". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line underneath the name.

Christiane Frischmuth
President, Global Frischmuth Consulting, LLC