

Cynthia W. Pratt
1710 Hobart Street, N.W., Washington, DC 20009
cprattdc@msn.com

April 27, 2016

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

Re: BZA Case 19256

Dear Chairperson Heath and Board Members:

I am co-owner and resident since 1975, with my husband Lawrence Rickards, of the house and property at 1710 Hobart St. NW.

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

We 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%. 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.”

However, the circumstances cited by the Applicant in her Burden of Proof (steep topography, location in a historic district, presence of a large tree, non-conforming structures) are not at all unique to 1716 Hobart St. and do not represent “extraordinary conditions.” Rather, these same conditions are common to most of the properties on the south side of Hobart St. (including ours at 1710 and the others within sight) as well as much of Mt. Pleasant generally.

We are also not convinced that “exceptional practical difficulties” exist. The Applicant cites an intention to “modernize and improve the efficiencies of the existing structure ...to accommodate her growing family (which now includes herself and her two children), and future live-in home care provider.”

But 40 years of observing families grow and thrive on Hobart St. without enlarging their homes suggests that any practical difficulties are not “extraordinary.” Just within our same section of Hobart St., there are several alternative examples for interior remodeling to accommodate the varied needs of different families.

2) The public interest must not be impaired by the requested variance.

We believe that the public interest would definitely be impaired by the introduction of a pop-up – and the precedent it creates – for several reasons:

- a. Renovation trends, both good and bad, catch on quickly. Being in a historic district, these trends have so far only taken hold indoors. But this precedent, by adding more square footage of living space to already-tight lots, is likely to encourage homeowners (as well as developers) to split houses into two units. Single-family homes will gradually become duplexes, creating more pressure on parking and other issues resulting from increased density.
- b. The engineering issues involved are unknown. These issues potentially impact the immediately-adjacent houses that share common walls with 1716 Hobart St. and eventually other houses as the trend catches on.

For example, rain that collects between the front of the pop-up and the rear of the mansard roof on the existing house would have no place to go unless there is a very well-designed drainage system. With no apparent owner access planned for that part of the roof at 1716, how would the drainage system be maintained and kept clear of debris from large oak trees on the street? Water with nowhere to go does not necessarily respect property lines.

Additional engineering questions include the added weight of pop-up side walls resting on party walls that adjacent houses share, and the added weight of snow on adjacent houses due to drifting against the side walls of the pop-up.

We understand that, in a perfect world, these engineering issues would be resolved during the permitting phase. But we simply do not have confidence in that process to protect the interests of adjacent neighbors – including the undersigned if this precedent becomes a trend.

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

Sincerely,



Cynthia W. Pratt