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1739 Harvard Street NW
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October 22, 2017

Dear Neighbors and ANC 1-D:

We are the owners of 1739 Harvard Street, and in advance of the ANC 1-D meeting on October 24, we are replying to the letter from certain of our neighbors raising concerns about our proposed rear extension project.

As explained at the September meeting, we started plans for this project with the idea of creating another bedroom on the third floor. This room could be used to better accommodate grandparents who frequently visit to take care of our nearly 3-year-old son, or frankly speaking, possibly another child down the road. Currently our guest bedroom is on the first floor, which requires going up and down two flights of stairs, and that can be difficult for Peng's parents. We also thought having more indoor space on the second floor would be more useful year-round than our current outdoor deck.

Our plans for the project pre-dated the "10 foot" exception and so this process of ANC input and BZA approval was unexpected. The process has clearly provided a forum for neighbors to bring forth their concerns, which we have no issues with. In fact, we're glad that it's an open process and that we're hearing people's views.

However, we do want it to be known that we've been considering neighbors' potential concerns from the outset. First, we knew it would be important for neighbors for the design to be attractive. In deciding on an architect for our project, we put special emphasis on a team that would understand the fabric of Mount Pleasant and create a design that would work not just for us, but for the exterior design of the row. Our architects at Studio Crowley Hall are residents of Mount Pleasant, have done many projects in the neighborhood and clearly have a good feel for what does and doesn't work for Mount Pleasant homes. Second, we picked a local contractor who has a great reputation (backed up by numerous references) for finishing projects on time. Our contractor will also have a dedicated on-site project manager who would be accessible to neighbors in the event of any issues. Third, while the footprint of our property could support a larger extension under zoning rules, we chose to limit it to 14 feet on the second level (the ground level in the back) and a 12-foot extension on the third level. We had anticipated neighbors' concerns with anything larger.

When the "10 foot" exception came into effect, our design and plans were largely complete with the dimensions mentioned above. Realistically, we think most people would agree that 12-14 feet still doesn't provide a very large room and that 10 feet is really quite tight. Taking that into consideration, we thought 14 feet at the ground level and 12 feet at the upper level was a modest but sufficient amount of space to accomplish our goals for the project. Therefore, we did not scale back to 10 feet and instead decided to go forward with the BZA approval.

Based on the feedback thus far, it's clear that certain neighbors would be against extensions of any kind (especially at the third level) even at 10 feet or less. However, the question the BZA will address (and which the ANC is advising on) is the impact not of any extension, but rather the impact of an extension beyond 10 feet. Extending the ground level doesn't seem to be an issue, since that doesn't result in shadows. So boiling it down, the question is what the impact is of 10 feet vs 12 feet at the third level. This is a tough question for the ANC and BZA and honestly, we sympathize with those who are trying to make this decision.

In the spirit of trying to make the decision easier for everyone, we've now offered to compromise by scaling the project back to 11 feet on the top level and 13 feet on the ground level, contingent upon our neighbors dropping their opposition at the BZA. We hope that the ANC can appreciate us splitting the difference between 12 feet and 10 feet, and offer support for our project. We think it is in everyone's interest to move forward on good terms, with compromise, and with no further undue delays.

Lastly, we note that the neighbors' letter suggests that property values would be negatively affected as a result of our project. We would hope the ANC observes that this type of rear extension is well within the scope of what has been done in Mount Pleasant on countless other homes, and it clearly has not affected the steady rise in property values in this neighborhood. Part of what makes a neighborhood thrive is when families are able to grow in their homes and stay in the community. Among other things, this supports businesses and, importantly, local schools. We encourage the ANC to consider this perspective as well, and to understand that taking a rigid view on expansion slightly beyond 10 feet will affect the larger Mount Pleasant community beyond our row.

In any event, we want to continue handling the process positively and constructively, and we're open and available for more communications with our immediate neighbors, others on the row and the ANC.

Sincere regards,
Adam Ross & Peng Wu

CC:

Government of the District of Columbia // Board of Zoning Adjustment
ANC 1-D Commissioners
Residents of 1701 to 1761 Harvard Street NW