

October 26, 2017

Board of Zoning Adjustment for the  
District of Columbia  
441 4<sup>th</sup> Street N.W., Suite 210 South  
Washington, D.C. 20001

Re: Additional letter of support for approval of Special Exception for the properties at  
1739 and 1745 Harvard St. NW

Dear Board of Zoning Adjustment:

I am a neighbor and property owner at 1755 Harvard St. NW. I noticed that some of the letters submitted in opposition to the 1739 and 1745 Harvard applications make some very negative claims about what it's like to live next to a popback on our row. I feel compelled to comment on this, because I live directly next to the largest popback on our row of identical houses, far larger than the very modest popbacks planned by 1739 Harvard and 1745 Harvard. Since I have no popback at all, I've seen the most difference a popback can make – and it's incredibly minimal. My wife and I are out in the backyard all the time in the summer, and the popback doesn't make a bit of difference to our quality of life. The sun and shadow studies that persuaded the Office of Planning to approve these projects bear this out; due to the dimensions and orientations of our backyards, it just really doesn't have much of an impact.

People often have a fear of change in their neighborhoods that goes beyond what the evidence actually suggests. In addressing this issue, our local ANC member and some neighbors have taken the position that the subjective feelings of individual neighbors should be given higher consideration than a more objective assessment based on light and shadow studies as well as comparisons to other projects. In essence, they would like you to adopt an “if it feels bad to the neighbors, then it's bad” standard. This would be a mistake for a number of reasons.

First, it will push neighbors across the city to stake out extreme positions in these cases order to extract maximal concessions from one another. Second, it will likely erode good will between neighbors, even during times when no projects are being actively disputed. If neighbors' feelings about a project can now trump more objective assessments, a neighbor holds the power to act on a personal slight or shifting whims to entirely upend the life plan of the person living adjacent to them. The natural result is that relationships between neighbors become more calculated and ‘political’ – it's hard to let your guard down around someone who holds significant power to harm you. On our row, we're already starting to see that happen; I've had multiple people on our row tell me that they quietly support the plans for popbacks at 1739 and 1745, but that they are worried about the consequences of publicly crossing the vocal coalition of neighbors in opposition.

I understand that in many areas of the city these popbacks are simply ‘nice to have’ but ultimately unnecessary for maintaining one's quality of life. However, in our modestly sized rowhouses (many of which have only two bedrooms total) an addition means the difference between getting to remain in DC with a growing family and having to pack up and leave town

due to lack of space. A fair and just process should not prioritize an objectively minor reduction in sunlight during certain peak days and seasons over the ability of our neighbors to raising a family in our community for decades to come.

Sincerely,

/s/ Joe McReynolds