

Case 20143
Grand Realty, LLC
Letter in Opposition

November 20, 2019

VIA ELECTRONIC MAIL

Mr. Frederick L. Hill, Chairperson
Board of Zoning Adjustments
441 4th Street NW, Suite 210S
Washington, DC 20001
Submitted to: bzasubmissions@dc.gov

RE: Letter in Opposition to Application for Special Exception Case 20143, Grand Realty LLC

To the Chairperson and Members of the Board:

We, the undersigned neighbors of 1117 Morse Street, NE, write in opposition to the above captioned application for special exception: As set out in the application, 1117 Morse Street, NE is currently a single family home, consistent with nearly all of the other homes on the 1100 block of Morse Street, NE and throughout our neighborhood (Trinidad). The Grand Realty LLC application seeks an exception under Subtitle U, Section 320.2 of the District Zoning Regulations (“Zoning Regulations”) to convert this beautiful and well-preserved family home and lot into a two (2) unit house with an additional 33 foot long accessory building, or Permanent Dwelling Unit (PDU) in the middle of the RF-1 zoned lot. We urge that you deny Application 20143 in order to fulfill the purposes of the Zoning Regulations to protect the character of our lovely, diverse and close knit community of neighbors.

Request for Exception to Convert RF-1 Zoned Single Family Residential Home to Apartment House with addition of a PDU (under Subtitle U, Section 320.2)

Our neighborhood, Trinidad, is currently zoned as RF-1. Under the Zoning Regulations, “the purpose of the RF-1 zone is to provide for areas predominantly developed with attached row houses on small lots within which no more than two (2) dwelling units are permitted.” This application seeks to convert a single family home into a two-unit apartment house with a third unit in a stand alone PDU. In order to approve an exception to the number of dwelling units permitted under Subtitle U, Section 320.2 of the Zoning Regulations, the Board must find that the application for the special exception has proven that the exception would cause “no undue adverse impact,” “will be in harmony with the general purpose and intent of the Zoning Regulations and Zoning Maps,” and “will not tend to affect adversely, the use of neighboring property.” Subtitle X, Section 901.2, 901.3.

Consistent with the purpose of the RF-1 zoning designation, Trinidad has been uniquely preserved within the District as a tightknit community of predominantly single family homes. Even with the vast development throughout the District, Trinidad has remained a diverse and close community of families and older residents, some of whom have joined the community recently and others who have been here for generations. In particular, the 1100 block of Morse Street is a quiet, tree lined residential block where children play together on the sidewalks as neighbors converse from their porches and families car- and bicycle-pool to local public and charter schools together. We all work hard to preserve

that sense of community. The homes are old and lovely, with 100-year old exteriors and detailed parapets of only a few varieties. While many homes have modern, renovated interiors, apart from the two or three condominiums that have been erected in the last three years, every home has preserved the distinctive, historical facades of the homes on our street.

On the 1100 block of Morse Street, NE, there are few homes that are other than single family homes and one, small separated multi-unit apartment complex. Of those, only two have been converted to three unit apartment houses, approval for which was granted prior to the recent change to the zoning regulations. As is readily apparent to anyone driving down the block, the three unit apartment houses appear incredibly out of place and, as neighbors, we are deeply sorry that we did not take action in time to oppose that project. They remain a reminder to us all that we are responsible for communicating our objections to the Board if we are to preserve the character of our community, as we successfully did with your help in the recent case of 1167 Morse St, case 19326.

The proliferation of apartment houses in this area jeopardizes the appearance and character of what is otherwise one of the few places left in the city where families can put down roots and create lifelong homes. Communities like ours are important to the diversity of the District and particularly to the District's schools. As you are aware, there are apartment complexes being developed throughout the city – it is difficult to drive a block in the NE without encountering some new construction project with beautiful, modern apartments “coming soon.” Only a few blocks away on H St. NE, it appears that there will be several opening in the next year. While we recognize that the Zoning Regulations provide that homes in this area may be converted to two unit flats, which do not strictly conform to our incredibly homogenous community, permitting three units on a lot is a step too far and will have consequences well beyond the one property at issue in this case.

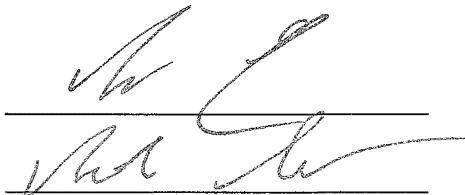
With each exception granted to permit an apartment house or a third unit in the form of a detached PDU, this neighborhood will have fewer families and fewer long term residents because of the amount a “flipped” property with three units will fetch for developers looking to profit from our rare, deep lots in Trinidad. If the BZA grants this exception, future developers eyeing turnover in the neighborhood will be willing to far outbid families for homes as they come on the market, in reliance on the fact that they can resell three units for significantly more than two. A family of four or five can live comfortably in one these beautiful old homes for a lifetime, sending their children to the local school and investing and participating in the community. Unfortunately, in the current market developers are outbidding families each time one of these homes is sold, with the hope of converting them to multi-unit apartment houses that are unlikely to attract such residents, both because of the limited size of each unit and the expense.

In addition, we are facing a parking crisis that will only be exacerbated by apartment houses like the complex proposed for 1117 Morse Street, NE, which provides a limited parking space to support three units. Already, neighbors in need of street parking often must walk blocks, with small children in tow, to park, particularly on the two days during which only one side of the street is available due to street sweeping. Adding residences with insufficient parking will create a nightmare parking scenario for many of us. As a community, we have already made inquiries about permitted parking but, as we

understand, if permits are issued they will be available to apartment house resident just as they would be to current neighbors.

We recognize the need for apartment housing in the city, but, as a matter of policy, urge the Board also to consider the District's broader interest in balancing the proliferation of apartments throughout the District with preserving a diverse mix of residents and maintaining communities like ours that attract long term, committed residents. The alternative for many will be the suburbs. We ask: if not here, under what circumstances would the RF-1 zoning designation, and the intent behind it, be protected? What is the purpose of designating an area for one and two dwelling spaces if, in a community such as ours, an exception like that sought by Grant Realty, LLC, would be granted? If permitted here, the exception under Subtitle U, Section 320.2 will simply swallow the rule.

For these reasons, this application would clearly result in an "adverse impact" upon the neighboring property owners and community as a whole, is manifestly at odds with "the general purpose and intent of the Zoning Regulations" and, thus, cannot satisfy the burden of proof set out under Subtitle X, Section 901.2 and 901.3 which is required to be demonstrated for the Board to grant a special exception of this nature. In conclusion, we urge that the Board act on its mission to fulfill the purpose and intent of the Zoning Regulations by denying this application for special exception.



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