

Testimony by Marlene Berlin at 4526 30th Street, NW
Hearing on BZA 20594 of Nezahat and Paul Harrison
In support of Subdivision at 3007 Albemarle Street, NW

I am Marlene Berlin, and I am a neighbor that was formally notified of the subdivision of 3007 Albemarle Street. Soon after the notification I contacted Paul Harrison. We arranged a time for him to come over and show me the plans.

I was particularly concerned about management of stormwater runoff from that location. I have lived in my house since 1989, and every winter the water flowing from this property creates thick areas of ice both on the road and sidewalk at Albemarle Street. This makes traveling by car or on foot treacherous.

When Paul showed me the plans, I was delighted to hear that he had hired CAS Engineering to address this longstanding run-off problem. He also talked about his plans to heavily tree the lot. Another big plus since we have lost a lot of giant oaks in our neighborhood.

As plans were further refined, Paul would stop by and tell me the progress he was making. It was clear to me that he was acting as a good neighbor and concerned about being a good steward of the land.

I realized that if a real estate developer had bought this property, they would be concerned only with making a profit, not with building good relationships with neighbors and ultimately developing the property in a manner that takes into account the interests and concerns of adjacent neighbors. A developer would most likely build as a matter-of-right, which would leave little room for neighbor input. This happens routinely in our neighborhood.

I was called by Mary Lee O'Hara who lived next to the affected property, to support the fight to stop the Harrisons from subdividing the lot. I told her I would not support the effort because I believe the Harrisons, so long as they comply with building codes, setbacks and other regulations that apply, should be allowed to build two homes on a property that is over 30,000 square feet in size in a neighborhood that prescribes a minimum lot size of 7,500 square feet. Others called or stopped me in the neighborhood to get my views. Some had signed the letter that had been sent around to petition against the Harrisons plans.

I told them that if a developer had bought the property, it could be much worse. And if neighbors did not want the land developed, they should have bought it. The reality is that cities change and land gets developed. If people don't want building to happen around them they need to control the land. That means purchasing the land, which I understand the complaining neighbors had every opportunity to do.

To quote an old saying, I thought the neighbors who were fighting this project were looking a gift horse in the mouth.