

WRITTEN TESTIMONY FOR SUBMISSION

Board of Zoning Adjustment – Public Hearing

Wednesday, September 2, 2026 | Case No. 20974B

503–517 H Street NW – Application of DC Chinatown Hotel Owner, LLC

Submitted by:

Emily Russell

Resident & Board Member, Chinatown East Flats

809 6th Street NW, Washington, DC 20001

russell.emily.k@gmail.com | 703-447-9616

Introduction

I am a resident and Board Member of Chinatown East Flats, located at 809 6th Street NW—the residential building immediately adjacent to the proposed hotel development at 503–517 H Street NW. I am submitting this written testimony in opposition to the applicant's request to modify BZA Order No. 20974 by adding an additional story to the previously approved nine-story hotel addition.

I testified before the Historic Preservation Review Board at its March 26, 2026 hearing on this project. While the HPRB approved the revised concept, the Board itself acknowledged on the record that the daylight and solar impacts I raised are BZA's responsibility to evaluate—not HPRB's. That acknowledgment is precisely why I am here today.

The Core Issue: Shadow and Solar Impacts on Adjacent Residential Units

The applicant's own shading diagrams—submitted to the BZA as part of the original April 2024 application package—demonstrate that even the previously approved nine-story massing casts significant shadows on the adjacent block during key solar events, including the Winter Solstice and Spring Equinox. Those diagrams show material shadow coverage extending across the rear yard and into neighboring properties during morning, midday, and afternoon hours.

The current application seeks to go further—adding a tenth story to that already-approved footprint, with additional upper-floor setbacks that do not meaningfully reduce the shadow impact at the lower residential floors where it matters most. The incremental increase in height will worsen already significant shadow impacts on residential units in our building that face south and into the alley, particularly on the first through third floors.

Our own analysis, conducted using meteorological and geodetic tools, indicates that multiple

units in our building currently receiving meaningful daylight would lose most of their practical sunlight coverage as a result of the project at its approved nine-story height—let alone with the additional story now requested. Affected units would have virtually no practical sunlight on a regular basis during significant portions of the year.

Solar Panel Impact

In addition to the residential unit impacts, our building operates rooftop solar panels that contribute meaningfully to our building's energy budget. These panels were sited and oriented to capture optimal solar exposure. The proposed hotel tower—at its currently approved height and even more so with the additional story now sought—materially reduces the solar electricity generation capacity of those panels. This is a direct, quantifiable financial harm to our building's common expenses and to all unit owners.

To date, no completed, comprehensive solar impact analysis has been provided to us or, to my knowledge, entered into the BZA record. At the March 26 HPRB hearing, the applicant's representative, Stephan Rodiger of Rift Valley Capital, acknowledged on the record that a solar panel impact analysis was in process and that the project requires additional BZA relief. That analysis has not been shared with our building, and we have received no mitigation proposals.

Procedural History and Good-Faith Engagement

Beginning in February 2026, I raised these concerns formally with the HPRB and directly with the developer. On March 10, 2026, our building's board provided Rift Valley Capital with our architectural drawings—including the placement and interior dimensions of alley-facing windows—specifically to support an accurate, comprehensive shading analysis. Rift Valley's architect acknowledged receipt and indicated review was underway. No completed analysis or mitigation proposals have since been offered.

The HPRB's own shading study, as provided to us, does not address the daylight impact on alley-facing residential windows on the lower floors of our building—the units most severely affected. We have repeatedly raised this gap.

Relief Requested

We respectfully request that the BZA:

1. Deny the modification to add a tenth story until a complete, independently verified shading and solar impact analysis—one that specifically addresses the alley-facing residential windows at 809 6th Street NW on floors 1–3, and the rooftop solar array—has been submitted to the record and made available for public comment.
2. Condition any approval on the developer proposing and implementing meaningful mitigation measures for the shadow and solar impacts on adjacent residential properties, developed in consultation with affected neighbors.
3. Preserve the ability of affected residents to submit supplemental comments once a complete shading study is in the record.

The applicant is seeking a variance from rear yard requirements in addition to the height modification. We note that the rear yard variance directly affects the proximity of the building to alley-facing windows and is inseparable from the shadow impact analysis.

Conclusion

We are not opposed to development in our neighborhood. We recognize the value this project could bring to the Chinatown area. But the BZA exists precisely to ensure that zoning relief does not impose unreasonable burdens on adjacent properties. The combination of an additional story, continued rear yard non-compliance, and the absence of any completed shadow or solar impact mitigation analysis does not meet that standard.

We urge the Board to require a complete record before acting, and to ensure that the interests of the people who live next door to this project are meaningfully considered.

Respectfully submitted,

Emily Russell
Resident & Board Member, Chinatown East Flats
809 6th Street NW, Washington, DC 20001
russell.emily.k@gmail.com | 703-447-9616