

Re: Letter from Carol B. Stapp and Rose A. Stapp in Opposition to BZA Case No. 21098
(633 Rear E Street SE)

Dear Chairperson Hill and Members of the Board,

The proposed plan to convert 633 Rear E Street SE (“633 Rear E”) from a one-story commercial building into a principal dwelling unit with a second-story addition has necessitated an application to the BZA requesting a variance from alley lot development standards. The relief that is sought, however, will permit the intrusion of a structure detrimental to the ambiance of one of DC’s remaining clusters of historic alley dwellings, as well as to their residents’ quality of life. We therefore join with other neighbors in contesting the granting of the applicant’s request for a height variance.

As the owner of two properties affected by the proposed renovation of 633 Rear E, I have a long term investment in the integrity of the historic district in which both properties are located, as well as the livability of both homes. I have owned and resided at 611 E Street SE since 1981 (except during its renovation in 2003-04). I have also owned—and my daughter Rose has resided at—522 Archibald Walk SE since 1993 (except during its renovation in 2012-13).

We would welcome a renovation of 633 Rear E, if it were in keeping with the surrounding built environment and if it did not compromise the everyday lives of neighboring residents. The proposed plan, however, fails to abide by the height restrictions that are in place specifically to protect the character and enhance the livability of the surrounding built environment.

- Adding a second story will produce the jarring effect of a pop-up. The existing roofline is 17.5 feet on the south and 14.5 feet on the north. The 28-foot roofline of the proposed second story will increase the height of 633 Rear E on the south by 10.5 feet and on the north by 13.5 feet, almost doubling the current height of the roofline on the north. It will glaringly conflict in scale with the houses to the north and east, as well as with the former commercial building to the south.
- The addition of a second story will also have a substantial negative effect on the quality of life of 633 Rear E’s closest neighbors on Archibald Walk. The request for a variance for the second story is predicated on 633 Rear E’s future occupants’ desire for natural light and privacy. In direct consequence, however, the residents of the historic alley dwellings at 518, 520, and 522 Archibald Walk will suffer a loss of both access to natural light and their right to privacy.

An appropriate proposal to transform 633 Rear E into a principal dwelling unit should take into account both the practical limitations of the existing structure and the zoning restrictions of a designated historic district, as well as avoid impinging upon the livability of nearby homes. We therefore respectfully urge the Board of Zoning Adjustment to deny the applicant’s request for a height variance for 633 Rear E Street SE.

Sincerely,

Carol B. Stapp
611 E Street SE

Rose A. Stapp
522 Archibald Walk SE