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To the members of the Board,

When I found Ching Ching Cha in Georgetown before its transplant to 21st Street, it had already for many years been a second home for an eclectic mix of journalists, students, artists, lawyers, and the occasional Cabinet official. Every surrounding shop and restaurant but this one had faced the dead cold of a January blizzard and balked, and so I was lured in by windowlight on the black ice. I stumbled in half frozen fifteen full minutes after close. The timing was my error, but by Hollie’s reaction you would be forgiven for thinking it had been hers. She comped me a big cup of tea (nicely packed and insulated for a long walk) and only after I’d assured her that I would certainly come back the next morning for more tea did she finally release me out into the snow.

But for all of her past centrality in Georgetown, I was pleased to see Hollie make her move to 21st Street. Its district is one of Washington’s most important, and it deserves Ching Ching Cha’s sense of life. This is a place which, in the old style of a Chinese teahouse, is uniquely consecrated to conversation. In its current incarnation, Ching Ching Cha’s half dozen tables seat maybe twenty or so next to a wall of teaware beautiful enough to compete with anything in any city gallery. Its cream walls, hardwood, and the sweep of its windows make it warm and light and airy, and it so matches the character of the street that it seems inconceivable that it hasn’t been there at least as long as its neighboring rowhouses. Ching Ching Cha’s tea service is its source of life - a lubricant for talk in one of the last real cafes. My godfather said it like this: “This is one of the few places in the world still worth spending money.”

Of course, it was obvious right away what the suspension of its tea meant for the teahouse. And even though Ching Ching Cha’s proprietress has faced this new reality with dignity and serious courage, I’ve observed the way it has affected her natural cheer - and her business.

It may be rare for a zoning decision to have simple life-and-death power for such a long lived place, but this is fact. I strongly urge the Board to grant Ching Ching Cha’s the ability to sell and serve tea, to secure the longevity of a small business and add a note of grace to one of Washington’s defining districts.

Daniel