

June 15, 2026

Board of Zoning Adjustment

District of Columbia Office of Zoning

Re: Opposition to BZA Case No. 21439 — 1908 Irving Street NE, Washington, DC 20018 (Square 4207, Lot 5)

Dear Members of the Board of Zoning Adjustment:

I am a resident of 3017 16th Street NE, Washington, DC, located approximately one block from the subject property, and I write in strong opposition to the special exception requests filed by 1908 Irving St, LLC in BZA Case No. 21439. The applicant seeks special exception approval under Subtitle U § 421 to construct a new multi-family apartment building in the RA-1 zone, and under Subtitle F § 201.4 to utilize Voluntary Inclusionary Zoning (IZ) bonus density. I respectfully urge the Board to deny both requests. The proposed project does not satisfy the special exception standards, and its design — eight units of six-bedroom apartments on a 8,311 square foot lot flanked by single-family homes — is fundamentally incompatible with the established character of this neighborhood.

I. The Special Exception Standard Requires Affirmative Findings That Cannot Be Made Here

Under Subtitle X § 901.2, the Board may grant a special exception only where it finds that the proposed use (a) will be in harmony with the general purpose and intent of the Zoning Regulations and Zoning Maps, and (b) will not tend to affect adversely the use of neighboring property in accordance with the Zoning Regulations and Zoning Maps. These are not rubber-stamp determinations — the burden rests squarely on the applicant, and the Board must make affirmative findings on both prongs.

The Office of Planning's memorandum dated June 11, 2026 recommends approval, but its analysis glosses over critical deficiencies in the proposal. The Board is not bound by OP's recommendation and should conduct its own independent assessment of the evidence in the record.

II. The Proposed Development Is Not in Harmony with the Intent of the RA-1 Zone

The RA-1 zone is intended to permit moderate-density residential development. This block of Irving Street NE is overwhelmingly characterized by single-unit detached dwellings. Both immediately adjacent lots — Lots 4 and 6, to the east and west — are single-unit detached homes, also zoned RA-1. Directly to the north, across the rear alley, are single-family homes on smaller lots zoned R-1B. The subject property itself is currently developed with a two-story, single-family dwelling.

Against this backdrop, a three-story, eight-unit apartment building with an entirely six-bedroom unit mix is far outside the moderate-density character the RA-1 zone is designed to protect. While the regulations technically permit multi-family uses by special exception, the special exception process exists precisely to allow the Board to determine whether a particular project, at a particular location, in its particular configuration, is appropriate. Here, the answer is no.

III. The All-Six-Bedroom Unit Mix Creates Unacceptable Density and Livability Concerns

The applicant proposes eight units, every one containing six bedrooms. As confirmed in the Unit Schedule (Exhibit 29B), the units range in net area from 1,187 to 1,313 square feet. This means each six-bedroom unit averages only approximately 80 to 120 square feet per bedroom — a figure that falls far below any reasonable standard for comfortable habitation in a multi-person dwelling. Also, there are only 300 square feet for living and kitchen space for each unit.

More troubling is what this unit mix implies for actual occupancy. Six-bedroom units marketed in a dense urban setting are almost invariably rented by the bedroom to unrelated individuals. If each bedroom is occupied by even one person, the building would house at least 48 residents. The RA-1 zone does not contemplate this level of functional density on an 8,311-square-foot interior lot flanked by single-family homes.

The Board should ask: what is the intended market for eight six-bedroom apartments on Irving Street NE? The applicant has not explained this, and no evidence in the record justifies this design choice as consistent with neighborhood character or the intent of the RA-1 zone.

IV. The Kitchen and Living Areas Are Incompatible with the Scale of the Units

A review of the floor plans in Exhibit 29B reveals that each unit's combined kitchen and living area measures approximately 300 to 339 square feet. This is the sole shared living space for a unit designed to house six people. To put this in perspective, the average new apartment in Washington, DC measures approximately 744 to 745 square feet in total, according to recent market data — meaning the kitchen and living space in each proposed unit is barely larger than a typical DC studio apartment, yet is expected to serve six residents.

A conventional two-bedroom DC apartment — designed for one or two residents — averages approximately 995 square feet in total floor area. The six-bedroom units proposed here offer a combined kitchen and living area less than one-third of that, shared among six occupants. These are not family apartments designed to provide dignity and livable space to large households; they are configurations optimized for maximum bedroom count at the expense of all other habitability considerations.

The Board should scrutinize whether units of this configuration can genuinely serve the residential purposes that justify the IZ density bonus, or whether they represent an attempt to squeeze the maximum number of leasable bedrooms from the allowable building envelope.

V. The Proposal Provides Grossly Inadequate Common and Recreational Space

The Unit Schedule in Exhibit 29B reveals that the building's total common space consists of four areas totaling approximately 360 square feet: a 108 SF common area on the first floor, a 42 SF common area also on the first floor, a 108 SF common area on the second floor, and a 102 SF common area in the cellar.

The Office of Planning's own memorandum concedes the point directly: "The proposal does not include any dedicated external or internal recreation spaces." (Exhibit 34, p. 5.) In its place, OP points to Langdon Park Recreation Center and Chuck Brown Memorial Park, both located approximately 0.2 miles away, as a substitute for on-site amenity space.

This is insufficient. Directing future residents of a 48-person building to a public park more than a quarter-mile away does not satisfy the Board's obligation under Subtitle U § 421.2(b) to ensure the adequacy of "recreation ... to accommodate the residents that can be expected to reside in the project." Approximately 360 square feet of common space — roughly 7.5 square feet per resident at full occupancy — is not a meaningful amenity provision. It is barely sufficient for a hallway. This will likely lead to use of sidewalk and use of commercial property after hours.

The Board should not approve a project that, by the applicant's own plans, provides no dedicated recreation space whatsoever and parcels out the bare minimum of internal common area.

VI. The Project Will Adversely Affect Neighboring Properties

Under Subtitle X § 901.2(b), the Board must find that the project will not "tend to affect adversely the use of neighboring property." That finding cannot be made here for the following reasons:

- **Shadow and Light:** The solar studies submitted by the applicant (Exhibits BZA21–BZA28) demonstrate that the proposed 32-foot-tall building will cast significant shadows on the adjacent single-family homes at 1906 and 1910 Irving Street NE at multiple times of day across all four seasons. OP's dismissal of this impact as "inherent" to the transition to multifamily uses fails to grapple with the specific, measurable shadow impacts documented in the applicant's own submission.
- **Parking and Traffic:** The applicant proposes four on-site parking spaces for a building that could house nearly 50 residents. While the Zoning Regulations require only one space, that minimum was designed for a conventional unit mix — not a building purpose-built for maximum per-bedroom occupancy. The resulting parking demand will spill onto Irving Street NE and surrounding residential streets.
- **Trash and Service:** The applicant proposes two 12-yard commercial dumpsters in the rear yard, serviced by a private contractor via the 15-foot public alley. An alley of that width is not designed to accommodate repeated large commercial

vehicle access, and the resulting traffic will disrupt the adjacent R-1B properties along Jackson Street NE that back to the same alley.

- Tree Removal: The applicant proposes to remove three of four existing trees, including a specimen subject to a DDOT special tree permit, eliminating mature canopy that provides shade, stormwater management, and character to the immediate block.
- Oppositions from Neighbors: as provided to the Board, many neighbors in the direct vicinity oppose this project.

VII. The IZ Bonus Density Is Not Warranted

The applicant also seeks special exception approval under Subtitle F § 201.4 to utilize IZ bonus density, increasing the FAR from the matter-of-right maximum of 0.9 to 1.08. This bonus is not an entitlement — it requires the same special exception findings discussed above.

The IZ program is designed to produce affordable housing. But affordable housing goals do not override the Board's obligation to evaluate neighborhood compatibility. Providing one income-restricted unit among eight six-bedroom apartments does not transform an incompatible project into an appropriate one. The Board should not allow the IZ bonus to serve as a vehicle for maximizing market-rate density in a single-family neighborhood context.

VIII. Conclusion

For the foregoing reasons, I respectfully urge the Board to deny both special exception requests in BZA Case No. 21439. The proposed project — eight six-bedroom apartments with virtually no common or recreational space, insufficient parking, and significant shadow impacts on adjacent single-family homes — fails the special exception standards under Subtitle X § 901.2. It is not in harmony with the intent of the RA-1 zone as applied to this block, and it will adversely affect neighboring properties.

I note that ANC 5B has not yet filed a report in this matter. I urge the Board to ensure that the ANC has a full and adequate opportunity to weigh in before any decision is rendered, and to give the ANC's ultimate recommendation appropriate weight.

I appreciate the Board's careful consideration of this matter and am available to testify at the hearing or to submit additional materials upon request.

Respectfully submitted,

Michael Tran

3017 16th Street NE