

BZA CASE NO. 21451
133 Galveston Place, SW (SSL 6239 0089)

Testimony of O'Rayon McKnight
Property Owner

1. My name is O'Rayon McKnight. I am the owner of 133 Galveston Place, SW (the "Property"). I served in the U.S. Army Reserve for 14 years and recently completed my service in September of last year.

2. In April 2024, I purchased the Property. The seller represented that it had long been used as a four-unit apartment house, which matches the existing structural layout. The Property was vacant when I closed on the purchase.

3. In response to the Office of Planning's question regarding how long the property was used as an apartment building, I spoke with long-time neighborhood residents, who indicated their understanding that the property has functioned as an apartment building for a substantial period of time.

4. Based on that history and what was represented to me, my goal has been to restore the building so it can again function as a four-unit apartment house. I intend to provide stable, affordable housing, especially for military veterans like myself.

5. In June 2025, I filed a Certificate of Occupancy application to use the Property as a four-unit apartment house. I also began working with a contractor to move the permitting process forward and bring the Property back into safe, livable condition.

6. However, earlier this year, I was advised by the Zoning Administrator that zoning relief was needed to proceed. I then filed this application seeking a use variance.

7. I am not proposing to expand the building. There will be no exterior additions or increase in footprint. The work is focused on restoring what is already there. Because the building was originally designed as a four-unit apartment house, the renovation work will occur within the existing structure.

8. By contrast, based on estimates that I have received and which are included in the case record, converting the building into a single-family home would require major interior demolition, including removing walls, stairways, and core systems, followed by a complete redesign. It would be significantly more expensive than restoring the building to its original four-unit configuration.

9. The four-unit layout is the only financially viable path forward. Without it, I cannot move forward with the property. The revenue from four units is necessary to support the repairs. A single-family home, even with an ADU, would not generate enough income for me to do the needed work and the property would remain vacant and deteriorating until I can find someone to purchase the property, which I already tried and was successful.

10. Before pursuing this renovation, I explored selling the Property. It was listed for approximately four months, and we reduced the asking price by about 25%, but it did not generate a viable offer. We ultimately removed it from the market on June 30, 2025. A letter from my realtor detailing these efforts is included in the record at Exhibit 19G.

11. Restoring the building to a four-unit apartment house is consistent with the surrounding block. All of the properties along this portion of Galveston Place are apartment buildings. I went door-to-door to describe my project and received support from many neighbors.

12. My neighbors also recognize the longstanding use of this property and support restoring it as an apartment house. Their support is reflected in the petition at Exhibit 24, along with multiple letters in the record. I also received the ANC's support for the application.

13. Approval of this application will allow me to restore the property, return it to productive use, and add much-needed housing, including units I hope to make available to fellow veterans.

14. I respectfully ask the Board to consider the full context, including the property's history, the practical constraints, and the benefits of restoration, and to grant the requested variance. Thank you for your time and consideration of my testimony today.