Outlook

BZA Case No. 21510 – Proposed Rock Creek Club, 2325 Porter Street NW Request for U.S. Department of State Consultation

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Dear Members of the Board:

I am writing in connection with the proposed Rock Creek Club development at 2325 Porter Street NW, both as a former Ambassador to the United States and as a resident of the neighboring historic community.

I wish to bring to the Board's attention an important diplomatic and federal consideration that I believe warrants examination before a final decision is reached.

Several properties in the immediate vicinity of the proposed development are associated with the government of the People's Republic of China. These include 3500 Williamsburg Lane NW, identified as the Chinese Embassy's Cultural Office, and 3514 Williamsburg Lane NW, both of which were acquired for Chinese diplomatic use through arrangements involving the U.S. Department of State in 1984. Additionally, the nearby Porter Street Residences were commissioned by the Chinese government to accommodate Ministry of Education personnel and visiting scholars.

The historical involvement of the State Department in these properties makes federal consultation necessary and relevant.

The proposed conversion of a private residence into a membership club, with substantially increased visitor activity, vehicular traffic, recreational facilities, and associated operations, represents a significant change in the character and use of this historically residential enclave.

Given the proximity of foreign-government properties, such changes may raise legitimate questions concerning diplomatic security, access, privacy, and other issues. For example Williamsburg lane had a designated private security guard parked in front of these residences for many years, making these residences both part of the neighborhood and a well-guarded diplomatic zone.

Therefor we respectfully recommend that the Board request the DC Office of Planning and Office of Zoning to formally consult the U.S. Department of State, particularly its Office of Foreign Missions, and obtain written guidance regarding any diplomatic-property, security, or other federal considerations relevant to this application.

Board of Zoning Adjustment
District of Columbia
CASE NO. 21510
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I further recommend that the Board defer its final determination until the Department of State has had a reasonable opportunity to review the proposed development and provide its written assessment, including confirmation if no further federal action is necessary.

This request is not intended to confer special zoning privileges upon any neighboring property owner. Rather, it reflects the importance of ensuring that decisions affecting an area containing foreign-government properties are made with appropriate intergovernmental coordination and a complete understanding of any relevant federal interests.

Having served as an ambassador, I appreciate the importance of cooperation between local authorities and the Department of State in matters involving diplomatic properties. Such consultation is a reasonable and prudent step before authorizing a substantial change in the use and intensity of activity in this sensitive residential setting.

Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully,

Vladimir Petrovic
Former Ambassador to the United States
Owner, 2329 Porter Street NW
Washington, DC