

Statement by
David L. Swanson
On behalf of himself and his wife, Linda E. Swanson
4629 30th St. NW

Before the
Zoning Commission of the District of Columbia

September 5, 2002

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. And thank you for the service that you provide to this city that we all are proud to live in and help to preserve.

I am here to tell you that I, and my wife, Linda, support the Tree and Slope Overlay (Case No. 02-19 (Text Amendment – Forest Hills Tree and Slope Overlay District)). We join a substantial majority over the residents of our street in encouraging your approval of this proposal.

We have come to support this proposal for a number of reasons. I will mention two.

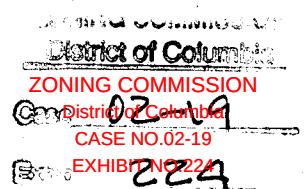
1. The Trees

When purchasing our home in 1979, we discovered that the house was on a DC plat map of the 1890's. Two extremely large oak trees were located on the front of the property. Both of these trees were preserved in building our home (prior to 1890). We know this because one of the trees died (in about 1981) because of a concrete paved driveway that was installed as part of a new home development next door just before we bought the property. The development of this home and this driveway cut into and covered at least 40% of the root system of the tree. The loss of root system and the loss of moisture that could reach the roots because of the driveway pavement determined the fate of the tree. When cut down, the tree rings indicated that this tree was more than 150 years old.

This tree was important to us. It was part of the value of the property. But it was valuable to us in that we expected that we would be able to pass it on to someone who would purchase our home sometime in the future.

There is another interesting feature of our home. A twin tree to the one which we lost has been preserved. Originally, our home had a Victorian porch which covered the front of the house. Sometime in the 1930's, we guess, that Victorian porch was removed and a much larger, wrap-around contemporary to that time porch was added with a parking portico to the north. This new porch had to be built right next to (or possibly around the second of these large oak trees.) Originally, or with a short time thereafter, , the porch and roof had to be build (or modified) to include a notch in the porch to provide growing room for the tree.

As the tree has grown, those of us who have lived in the home have enlarged this opening in the porch to accommodate the now much larger tree. Anyone who walks around our neighborhood can attest to the unique character of how residents of this home have accommodated this magnificent oak tree over the years.



You might be interested to know that this summer, we, with the sweat of our brow and the use of hand tools, cut out the joists and other structural elements of the porch and built a new and enlarged opening for this tree.

We expect that subsequent owners of this property will continue to make changes to the porch to accommodate the tree and the notched porch will be a recognized feature of our home for another 100 years.

We also believe that we saved this house from the bulldozer. When purchased, the home was in terrible condition. The woman who lived there had been a community leader (Secretary of the Forest Hills Citizens Association) and a gardener. The property was beautifully maintained until she aged, lost her ability to take care of the property, and let the house and yard deteriorate. Only someone like us with a sense of historic preservation would want it. We able to buy that house and restore it. It is a great house and home. We have been there now for 22 years.

2. Forest Hills Diversity and Family Values

Over the years, Forest Hills has been built by a wide variety of individuals, developers and some who come to represent their government from other countries. Put simply, we have large homes on large lots and we have modest sized homes on modest lots and we have smaller homers on smaller lots.

This diversity has been a lifeblood of the neighborhood. Couples with young children have been an important part of the neighborhood. They can find starter homes just as many did a half a generation earlier. The benefits to the neighborhood come in the form of new live with infants and toddlers as well as junior high and teenagers who are invaluable as baby sitters, grass cutters, snow shovelers. And one has to include experienced moms and dads who can sympathize and give support to the new moms and dads.

To the degree the character of the neighborhood changes and these smaller and modest homes are converted by development pressures, we lose this diversity and we lose a basic value of the neighborhood.

We care about the character of our neighborhood and we care about our trees. Of all the things that one looks to find in an urban environment, these have to be just about the top two. And we think it important for the city and for Forest Hills to retain that character. We believe our predecessors defined the character of the neighborhood. It is our responsibility to work hard to preserve it for future generations.

And, we believe that it is well within the reasonably exercised authorities of the Zoning Commission to adopt this proposal. We encourage you to do so in the strongest terms.

Thank you again for the opportunity to present our views.