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Before the Zoning Commission for the District of
Columbia, Case No. 08-06A

Comments by the Citizens Association of
Georgetown on

Alternative Language to Certain Advertised Text

September 5, 2014

The Citizens Association of Georgetown (“CAG”) submits the following comments on the alternative language for the Accessory Apartment provisions for R-1A and R-3. As background CAG and the over 1300 residents of Georgetown it represents has carefully reviewed the accessory apartment issue and has provided detailed input on it to the Office of Planning and in testimony and written comments to the Zoning Commission on the set down text. Permitting accessory apartments to be created in Georgetown is a controversial issue because of the potential for single family homes to be turned into apartment buildings, or worse rooming houses, changing the historic character of Georgetown and creating adverse impacts on neighboring property. Accordingly, CAG has urged that such apartments be permitted to be created but be subject to special exception review and various conditions designed to ensure the integrity of the principal dwelling and minimize the potential infill of open spaces in Georgetown with dwelling units in accessory buildings. As stated in the Preamble to the proposed regulations applicable to Georgetown, the objective of the zoning provisions should be to: “Protect the Georgetown Historic Landmark District and its historic character, buildings and open space” and “Retain the quiet residential character of these areas”. (D §1001.1)

1. Gross Floor area of the principal dwelling.

While CAG supports the proposed deletion of the minimum lot size requirement for accessory apartments within a principal dwelling CAG disagrees with the proposed reduction in R-20 of the minimum house area from 2000 to 1200 sq. ft. We request that the reference to R-20 [R-3] in §1606.5 be deleted and §1606.7 (b) be amended by adding a new subsection (b) that reads:

“(b) An accessory apartment within a principal dwelling shall be permitted provided that the gross floor area (“gfa”) of the principal dwelling, exclusive of garage space, is not less than 1750 sq. ft.”

We note that gfa is defined to include the entire floor area measured from the exterior walls or the center line of a party wall, and includes stairways, utility rooms, etc. which are commonly found in basement apartments. A three story building with 1200 sq. ft. gfa could have a basement of 360 sq. ft. gfa. Once the stairs, furnace room, other mechanical and electrical equipment and exterior walls are subtracted the result could be a dwelling space of around 250 livable sq. ft. That equates to a very modest size room that lacks adequate space for a kitchen and bathroom. Such a standard would encourage the destruction of the interior and potentially a portion of the exterior historic fabric of Georgetown’s small houses. If a new door on the side of the house is required (or placed by special exception in the front) the integrity of the existing structure would be compromised and adversely impact the historic district of Georgetown.

Because the Board has the authority in §1606.5(d) to modify the minimum house size requirement in appropriate cases, CAG believes that is the appropriate approach for any house less than 1750 sq. ft gfa in Georgetown.

2. Aggregate number of residents.

CAG strongly supports the requirement in existing law and in the proposed regulations (§1606.4) that the maximum aggregate number of persons that may occupy the principal dwelling and accessory apartment combined shall not exceed six (6). As the Commission may recall from the

Georgetown Campus Plan proceeding group houses composed of young residents were creating intolerable conditions for their neighbors in Georgetown. Any change that would permit more than a total of six persons to occupy a small townhouse in R-3 Georgetown would have very negative impacts on the peace and quiet of the neighborhood and would be opposed by CAG. Since any proposed change in §1606.4 should be the subject of notice and comment we assume no change is being proposed at this point.

3. Accessory apartment within an accessory building.

CAG supports the reuse for dwelling purposes of **existing** two story buildings that meet the standards in §1606.7. The proposed deletion of the requirement that the accessory building be in existence on January 1, 2013 would conflict with CAG's efforts to preserve green space and the historic setting of houses in Georgetown, in conflict with the goals of the Historic Landmark and Historic District Protection Act. Accordingly, CAG requests that this requirement be added to the Georgetown accessory apartment provisions in §1606.7. However CAG supports the reuse of all floors of a two story accessory building for dwelling purposes not just the second floor. CAG therefore requests that §1606.7(c)(1) be amended to read:

“(c) (1) It shall only be permitted if it complies with the following conditions:

- (1) The accessory building was a two-story building in existence on January 1, 2013;
- (2) No expansion or addition may be made to the accessory building to accommodate an apartment except by special exception.

Respectfully Submitted, ~



Pamla Moore, President

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