

January 15, 2015

D.C. Zoning Commission
441 4th Street, NW Suite 200S
Washington, DC 20001

Re: Case no. 14-11

Dear Members of the Zoning Commission:

My name is Brian Crawford and I have been a resident and taxpayer in Washington, D.C. since 1998 and have owned my house at 1513 Varnum Street, NW since August of 2010. This is the first time I've ever attended a Commission meeting, yet alone speak at one. But recently unveiled plans to develop a single family residential dwelling on my family-friendly street into a **seven-unit, 2 bedroom** condo building have forced me to take action.

Let me begin by acknowledging the difficult balance that the Zoning Commission (ZC) and the Zoning Administrator (ZA) must find between addressing the growing housing needs of the District with the rights of property owners.

Unfortunately, the zoning regulations - as currently written - provide a loophole for non-resident developers and house flippers to take advantage of the DC housing boom, make a quick profit, and move onto the next project (all with tacit approval from the ZC and ZA). In doing so, they pay no regard to the neighbors they are greatly impacting nor neighborhoods they are changing.

Let me provide you with an example which illustrates the problem that needs to be addressed by the Zoning Commission.

In his letter dated August 11, 2014 addressed to the real estate attorney of the developer of 1521 Varnum Street, Zoning Administrator Matthew LeGrant states, **“The primary purpose the R-4 District shall be the stabilization of remaining one-family dwellings.”**

While these are his words, the actions he has taken run completely contrary protecting single family dwellings. Later in that same letter, Mr. LeGrant goes on to grant “minor flexibility” pursuant to §407.1 from the minimum lot area requirements (§401.3) for the development of a seven unit condominium building. In justifying this minor flexibility, Mr. LeGrant sites a single Board of Zoning Adjustment (BZA) decision (Order No. 18108) where the BZA affirmed a decision of the ZA to grant a deviation from the

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minimum lot area requirements “so as to alleviate the need to seek *de minimus* zoning relief from the Board.”

Therein lies the problem – we need a better system of checks and balances to ensure that these types of short-sighted decisions that will drastically impact an entire neighborhood are viewed with a critical eye, not a rubber stamp.

While the proposed development may seem “minor” Mr. LeGrant and to the Potomac, Maryland based developer of this project, building a new seven unit condo building on our street is not minor to me or my neighbors. This proposed development will significantly negatively impact parking, public transportation, the shared alley between Varnum and Webster, and housing values

I ask the Commission:

- What is the purpose of having minimum lot area requirements if they can be disregarded so easily?
- And how is it that this type of project, where you a building an entirely new building in back of an existing structure, not deemed new construction?
- How does a property currently zoned as a single family, residential dwelling get approved to become a seven unit condo building without any public notice?
- Further, how is it that the ZA has authority to change the dynamics of an entire neighborhood, yet the owners and taxpayers of that neighborhood have NO say and NO recourse whatsoever?

The answers to these questions are contained in the zoning regulations which seemingly serve only to benefit developers at the expense of resident taxpayers and homeowners.

In summary, I strongly urge the Board to support proposed changes submitted by the Planning Office (PO) which would repeal of §330 5 (e) and prevent residential structures in R-4 zoned areas from being converted into apartment buildings of multi-unit condominium buildings. It is critical that the ZB, ZA and PO work together to stop the exploitation of our neighborhoods by non-resident developers and to contain the rampant pop-up and pop-out construction.

Thank you for your attention to this critical matter.

Sincerely,

Brian Crawford
1513 Varnum Street, NW
Washington, DC 20011