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January 9, 2015

Rabbiah Sabbakhan
Interim Director
Department of Consumer and Regulatory Affairs
1100 4th Street, SW
Washington, DC 20024

Re: Conversion of Allison St. NW Rowhouse into Three-Unit Condominium

Dear Interim Director Sabbakhan

We are writing to you as concerned residents in the Sixteenth Street Heights neighborhood of Ward 4. We recently learned that a developer purchased a two-story rowhouse at 1117 Allison Street, NW with the intention of converting it into a three-unit condominium. The developer plans to add a third level to the two-story rowhouse and build an extensive rear addition of approximately 40 feet in length. The rear addition would cover the entire width of the property, abutting against the fence on both sides and resulting in no side yards. Our neighborhood is zoned R-4.

As a community, we are unified in our concerns about the permanent, adverse impact the proposed "pop-up" multifamily building would have on our community. Our neighborhood consists primarily of two-story, single-family rowhouses. The proposed development of 1117 Allison Street into condominiums is incompatible with the character of our block and community. 1117 Allison Street is located in the middle of a block of two-story, single-family rowhouses. Converting it into condominiums by adding a third-story and enormous rear addition would change the historic character of our neighborhood, increase density and runoff, and dramatically reduce sunlight, air and privacy to neighboring properties.

In addition, the environmental impact of the proposed pop-up is disturbing. Parts of Allison Street, NW and adjoining Webster Street and Iowa Avenue are part of an initiative led by the District Department of the Environment ("DDOE") to reduce runoff into Rock Creek Park. The District government invested millions of dollars in this initiative. Many of us participated in it by working with DDOE to add rain and bay gardens, trees and permeable pavers to our yards. We also invested our own funds. The proposed development of 1117 Allison Street would reduce sunlight in several neighboring yards, thus negatively impacting the bay and rain gardens that were installed as part of the initiative. Additionally, it would result in less pervious surfaces, thus increasing runoff, which is contrary to the goals of the initiative. We request that the city assess the environmental impact of the proposed pop-up on our community.

As you are aware, the District government has recognized that pop-up houses are a significant concern for District residents, and the Office of Zoning has proposed a solution to remedy the problem in R-4 neighborhoods. Numerous newspaper articles have been written.

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District of Columbia
CASE NO. 14-11
EXHIBIT NO. 136

about the adverse consequences of these pop-ups. In addition, pop-up developments in R-4 Districts are inconsistent with the zoning code, which states that “the R-4 District shall not be an apartment house district.”

While we are aware that matter-of-right construction is not subject to community input, the city has yet to determine that the proposed development of 1117 Allison Street, NW is a matter-of-right. DCRA is reviewing the permit application. As a community, we are notifying you that we are extremely concerned about this proposed pop-up development and its impact on our properties and neighborhood. An apartment building in the middle of a block of single-family rowhouses is undesirable and inconsistent with the zoning code and character of our block.

We appeal to DCRA to perform a thorough review of the permit application and narrowly apply the law to the proposal. In addition, we request that you ensure that the developer complies with the protection and notification requirements for adjoining properties. Because of the permanent adverse consequences of the proposed pop-up, the developer must be held to the strictest standards required under the District’s laws. We expect that you will be fastidious in your review to ensure that permits are not issued improperly. We are cognizant of the negative impact some pop-ups have had in our community, particularly on nearby Buchanan and Shepherd Streets, and want to ensure that we do not suffer similar negative consequences.

Thank you for your prompt attention to this matter

Sincerely,

Concerned Residents of Sixteenth Street Heights
(Signature pages attached)
Email: allisonstreetnw@gmail.com

cc Mayor Muriel Bowser
Anthony Hood, Chairman, Zoning Commission
Sara Bardin, Director, Office of Zoning
Matthew LeGrant, Zoning Administrator, DCRA
Eric Shaw, Director, Office of Planning
Sam Ford, WJLA TV
Ian Shapira, Washington Post
Martin Austermuhle, WAMU
Lark Turner, Urban Turf
Judi Gold, Deputy Director, Constituent Services, Ward 4
Jeff Standish, ANC 4C03
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