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DC OFFICE OF ZONING
2015 JAN 29 175 V St, NE
Washington, DC 20002

29 January 2015

DC Office of Zoning
441 4th St, NW
Suite 200S
Washington, DC, 20001

Dear Sir or Madam;

As a District homeowner in an R-4 zoned rowhouse district, I feel compelled to speak out on the proposal (Case 14-11) to limit building height in neighborhoods such as mine. **I strongly support the proposal under consideration and I urge the city to approve it as soon as possible.**

I live in Eckington, in Northeast DC, a rapidly-gentrifying neighborhood of historic porch-front rowhouses. Since purchasing a home less than a year ago, after a lifetime in the DC area, I have watched with dismay as house after house has been irreparably and carelessly altered by the addition of a garish extra story, ruining the aesthetic appeal of our neighborhood while doing nothing to improve affordability.

The arguments opposing proposal 14-11 claim to be based on simple economics. They claim that such "pop-up" conversions add housing to the city, and help to keep rising home prices at bay by increasing the supply of available housing. For those unable to afford an entire single-family home, opponents say, a subdivided rowhouse with an extra story may provide a more feasible option for a first-time homebuyer.

But the properties undergoing unsightly renovations in my neighborhood prove this reasoning to be false. Firstly, many such "pop-ups" do not necessarily create more housing units. Having toured several in Eckington myself, the extra story is often used only to provide more additional living space in what remains a single family home. Thus, the added story only serves to enlarge a single family home, making it more expensive and further from the reach of a DC homebuyer. Furthermore, the suggestion that such "pop-up" conversions create affordable housing is not supported by facts. Un-renovated rowhouses of 3-4 bedrooms in Eckington tend to sell from \$350,000-\$500,000. However, among recent "pop-ups" in Eckington, even the cheapest 2-bedroom condominium apartments ask over half a million dollars and 3-bedroom residences sell for as much as \$745,000. These conversions do not add affordable units to the city. A buyer unable to afford the original rowhouse at \$450,000 will certainly be unable to afford an even smaller property for \$100,000 more. While creating two condos out of a single rowhouse creates obvious value for the developer, the value to the city, even in purely economic terms, is negative.

ZONING COMMISSION
District of Columbia
CASE NO. 14-11
EXHIBIT NO. 168
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CASE NO. 14-11
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Imagine if the city removed the financial incentive for developers to convert rowhouses in this manner by adopting Proposal 14-11. Without the potential for hundreds of thousands of dollars of profit, historic rowhouses would become less appealing to developers, who would stop making all-cash offers above asking price for individual rowhouses. Without this financial competition, regular homebuyers in the District – those seeking to live in a neighborhood, put down roots, and contribute to the community – would have a much better chance to purchase a home. Proposal 14-11, by removing the financial incentive offered by "pop-up" developments, gives ordinary homebuyers a chance to afford a home.

The financial arguments in favor of Proposal 14-11 are compelling. However, for me, an even more compelling issue is that of aesthetics. These haphazard conversions are uniformly ugly and destroy the unique historic charm of DC rowhouse neighborhoods. A walk around my neighborhood will show cinderblock and vinyl cubes interrupting the shingled roofs and dormer windows of the historic single-family rowhouses on either side. The turrets for which DC's rowhouses are famous are being demolished on U St NE, 1st St NW, and elsewhere in my neighborhood. Roof lines are irreparably destroyed on 4th St NE, T St NE, Todd St NE, and R St NE, to name just a few. While I normally would welcome the sale of a vacant or derelict property in my neighborhood as a sign of new investment, instead each new sale frightens me. Will we see a historic rowhome restored to its former glory? Or, as seems more likely, will another block be permanently destroyed in the name of developer profit?

Some might argue that a "pop-up" would be preferable to a vacant or derelict home. Indeed, there is a vacant, derelict rowhouse on my block. But I would rather see this home stay vacant and derelict for another year or two, waiting for a buyer to restore it properly, than risk its sale to a developer whose "pop-up" might help my property values, but would ruin my block's appeal forever.

I understand that aesthetics are a subjective matter, and that not all share my dim view of these new additions to Eckington. Many argue that we are in the midst of an affordability crisis, and that everything – including unsightly renovations – must be done to address it. I oppose this reasoning completely. DC has been in real crises before. In the 1950s and 1960s, this city faced declining population, disinvestment, and urban decay. Affordability was not a problem – keeping existing residents, rather than housing new ones, threatened the city's survival. Solutions were proposed for this crisis. Urban renewal flattened huge swaths of the city in hopes of clearing slums and building new neighborhoods. Highways ripped through Georgetown, Anacostia, Southwest, and other sections of the city to speed commuters from the suburbs. Historic structures were bulldozed across the city to make room for new freeways or new concrete housing blocks. The beauty of Washington – its L'Enfant Street grid, its historic architecture, its rowhouse neighborhoods – were all sacrificed in the name of addressing the crises the city faced.

These "solutions," which sacrificed the charm and aesthetics DC built over centuries in order to fix temporary problems, are universally seen as mistaken today. They failed to stop DC's population loss or solve the urban poverty issues they sought to address. Furthermore, we have spent decades repairing the damage of a mindset that thought that beauty and history and architecture must be destroyed to

address whatever immediate problem the city faces Projects at the Southwest Waterfront, or over I-395 in Northwest Washington are only now beginning to repair the damage of that worldview


This city has already tried sacrificing its historic architecture and charm to fix urban problems. It has not worked. And we have regretted it. Please remember this doomed trade-off when developers claim that ugly and expensive additions to our historic neighborhoods are necessary for the good of the city

Finally, those opposed to Proposal 14-11 argue that such a proposal would limit property rights As a homeowner in an R-4 district, I strongly disagree My home is valuable not only because of the rooms inside it but also because of the neighborhood in which it sits Should my block of uniform Wardman rowhouses transform into a hodgepodge of poorly designed vinyl pop-ups, all of our property values will suffer **"Pop-ups" are far more of a threat to my home's value than Proposal 14-11 is.**

I urge you, in the strongest possible terms, to approve Proposal 14-11 and to save my neighborhood and others from overpriced, historically disrespectful, and aesthetically heinous new additions Do not be convinced by invocation of "supply and demand" theories that ignore pricing realities on the ground Do not forget the lessons of Washington's past, when we destroyed what made the city special in a failed attempt to address the serious crises of the day And please do not let others claim to have my best interests at heart when they attempt to wave the false flag of property rights

I look forward to your eventual decision, and hopefully to many, many years of enjoying my historic neighborhood's charm and history.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Marshall Nannes", written over a horizontal line.

Marshall Nannes