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January 15, 2015

Chairman Hood and Commissioners,

My name is Betsy McDaniel, I purchased my home in Bloomingdale six years ago and spent more hours and dollars than I ever imagined, to restore my property. It was not until I was able to move into my home that I understood the relief my neighbors expressed when they learned that this little old woman from the Maryland suburbs was rehabilitating the grande dame on the corner, to live in as a single family home, and not convert it to the luxury condos that had been advertised by the large sign on the vacant, boarded up house.

While I recognize the desire of many in the District of Columbia to increase the housing stock, doing so at the expense of our architectural heritage is not the solution. I have discussed various options to preserve and protect the 100 year old rowhomes of Bloomingdale with neighbors, the Office of Planning, the Zoning Administrator at DCRA, and there is no easy path. The lowering of the height maximum in R-4 zones seems to be the most workable solution, and perhaps the most enforceable. Single family homes in my neighborhood are being converted to two, sometimes three, condo units and/or apartments. These conversions, some illegal, offer developers huge financial returns to remove and/or irreparably alter the turrets and rooflines of the homes, destroying the character of our neighborhood

The destruction does not always end with a pop-up. Some homes have had their stoops and porches removed; others have had their front yards dug up and removed, making the basement at ground level and essentially creating an additional floor. In the latest and most outrageous renovation, not only was the turret removed and a taller third floor created, but the front yard was completely dug out and the first floor was raised, which required bricking in the lower portion of the first floor windows. The house has become a four story house, topped by a roof deck and penthouse.

These additional horrors are not covered by the proposed text amendments, but it is the height of the building that is the source of the problem. Most of the rowhomes are of an adequate size for a family, and many have the space for a basement rental. But it is the conversion to two condos that seem to require a pop up, to create "three bedroom" units, many of which would be considered inadequate for a family. In fact, I don't think many of these bedrooms that realtors advertise are even large enough to qualify as a bedroom.

ZONING COMMISSION  
District of Columbia

CASE NO. 14-11

EXHIBIT NO. 77

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The Zoning Regulations repeatedly state that a lot of 1800 square feet is required for a building to be converted to two units, or 900 square feet per unit. Most lots in Bloomingdale are 1700 or less. If DCRA allows two unit condo conversions on all lots that do not meet the 900 square foot requirement, then almost every lot in the neighborhood is an exception. If all exceptions are considered matter of right, what protection does the current zoning offer? In addition, the Comprehensive Plan and the Zoning Regulations all cite the goal of preserving the architectural heritage of Bloomingdale in addition to stabilizing single family housing

Many neighbors are extremely supportive of Historic Designation, or the "light" option of a Conservation District, for Bloomingdale. However, the time and financial commitment for those pursuits is substantial, and at the rate of condo conversions we are experiencing, these options will be too late. (The Council recently passed a Small Area Plan that dropped the option of a Conservation District.) Time is of the essence and Bloomingdale needs help now.

Developers, most from Virginia and Maryland, have had their chance to prove their intentions, and what they have shown us is that they have no regard for our neighborhood or for zoning regulations. Failure to obtain proper permits and flagrant violations produce many stop work orders, but the projects proceed.

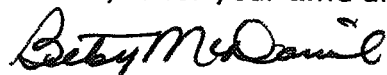
A neighborhood, who is an architect, had this to say when, I asked him about stopping pop ups:

*I believe additional floors can be added tastefully through the use of setbacks and keeping in the vernacular of the neighborhood, so I can't say I am completely opposed to allowing people to do this. Unfortunately there are more 'really bad' precedents than there are appropriate ones.*

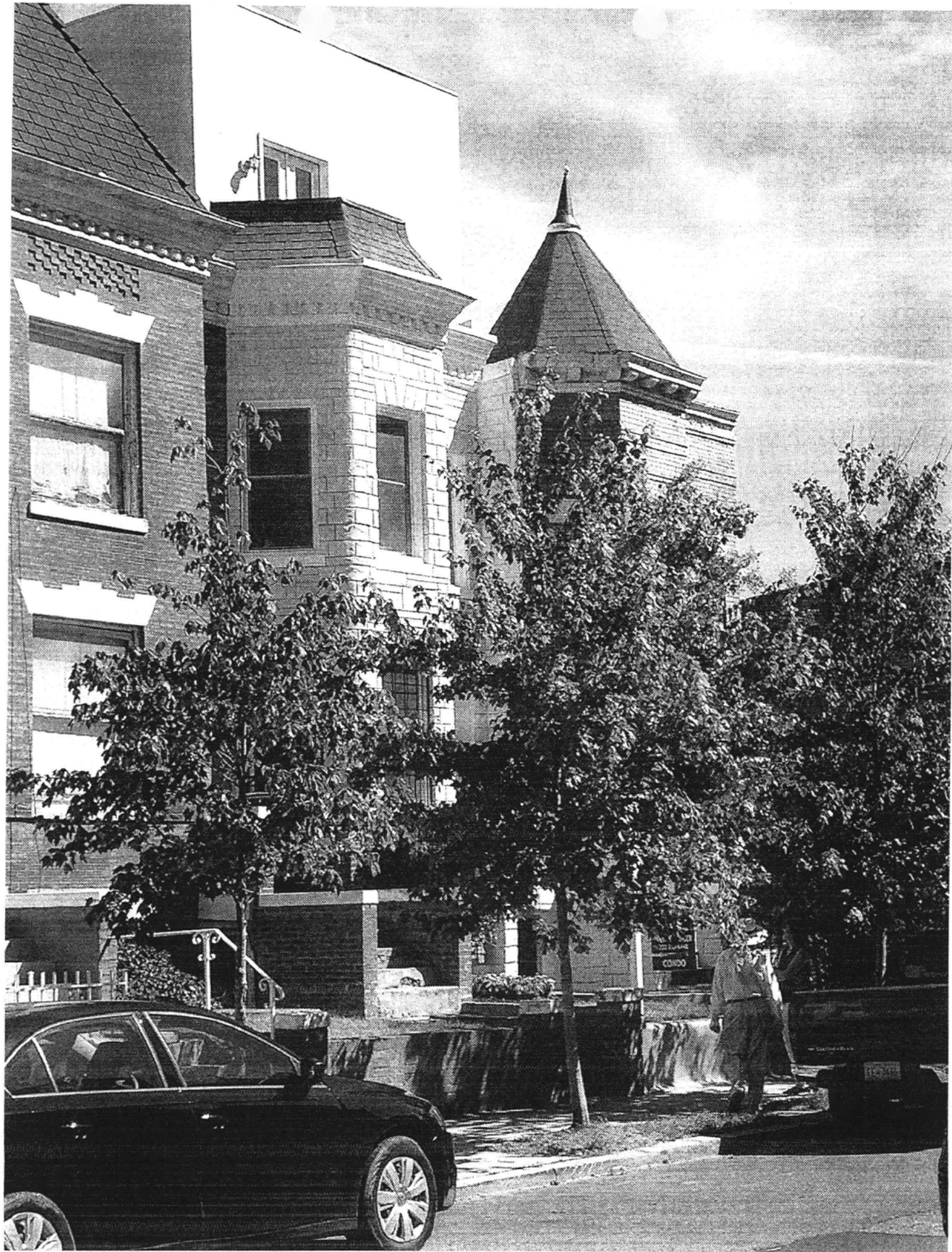
It's time to listen to, and to respect, those who live and pay taxes in the District, and appreciate the history and the heritage that is disappearing. Years from now, which will stand the test of time - a classic, intact, Victorian rowhome, loved by its owner, or a shipping crate, framed of cheap siding, dropped onto one of those homes?

Immediate action is imperative to stop the destruction of DC's beloved rowhomes. Bloomingdale is being eaten alive, and, I repeat, time is of the essence.

Thank you for your time and consideration.



Betsy McDaniel



## 2006 Comprehensive Plan

### Mid-City Area Element

There are also visible threats to the historic integrity of many of the area's residential structures, particularly in areas like Adams Morgan, Columbia Heights, **Bloomingdale**, and Eckington, which are outside of designated historic districts. In some instances, rowhouses are being converted to multi-family flats, in others, demolitions and poorly designed alterations are **diminishing an important part of Washington's architectural heritage** 2000 9

Ensure that the Comprehensive Plan and zoning designations for these neighborhoods reflect the desire to retain the row house pattern Land use controls should **discourage the subdivision of single family row houses into multi-unit apartment buildings** but should encourage the use of English basements as separate dwelling units, in order to retain and increase the rental housing supply. 2008.6

**The row house fabric that defines neighborhoods** like Adams Morgan, Columbia Heights, Pleasant Plains, Eckington, and **Bloomingdale should be conserved.** Although Mid-City includes six historic districts (Greater U Street, LeDroit Park, Mount Pleasant, Strivers' Section, Washington Heights and Kalorama Triangle), most of the row houses in Mid-City are not protected by historic district designations. Some are even zoned for high-density apartments A **variety of problems** have resulted, including demolition and replacement with much larger buildings, the **subdivision of row houses into multi-unit flats**, and **top story additions that disrupt architectural balance.** Intact blocks of well-kept row houses should be zoned for row houses, and not for tall apartment buildings, and **additional historic districts and/or conservation districts should be considered to protect architectural character.**

**Policy MC-2 7 2** Eckington/Bloomingdale

**Protect the architectural integrity** of the Eckington/Bloomingdale neighborhood, and encourage the continued restoration and improvement of the area's row houses 2017.5

**Action MC-2 7.B:** Conservation District

Consider the designation of the Eckington/Bloomingdale/Truxton Circle neighborhood as a Conservation District, recognizing that most of its structures are 80-100 years old and may require additional design guidance to ensure the compatibility of alterations and infill development.

## Excerpts - R-4 Zoning Regulations

### Summary:

- R-4 Permits matter-of-right development of single-family residential uses (including detached, semi-detached, row dwellings, and flats), churches and public schools with a minimum lot width of 18 feet, a **minimum lot area of 1,800 square feet** and a maximum lot occupancy of 60% for row dwellings, churches and flats, a minimum lot width of 30 feet and a minimum lot area of 3,000 square feet for semi-detached structures, a minimum lot width of 40 feet and a minimum lot area of 4,000 square feet and 40% lot occupancy for all other structures (20% lot occupancy for public recreation and community centers), and a maximum height of three (3) stories/forty (40) feet (60 feet for churches and schools and 45 feet for public recreation and community centers) Conversions of existing buildings to apartments are permitted for lots with a minimum lot area of 900 square feet per dwelling unit Rear yard requirement is twenty (20) feet

### 330 R-4 DISTRICTS: GENERAL PROVISIONS

330 1 The R-4 District is designed to include those areas now developed primarily with row dwellings, but within which there have been a substantial number of conversions of the dwellings into dwellings for two (2) or more families

330 2 Very little vacant land shall be included within the R-4 District, since its primary purpose shall be the stabilization of remaining one-family dwellings

330 3 The R-4 District **shall not be an apartment house district** as contemplated under the General Residence (R-5) Districts, since the conversion of existing structures shall be controlled by a minimum lot area per family requirement

330 4 Except as provided in chapters 20 through 25 of this title, in an R-4 District, no building or premises shall be used and no building shall be erected or altered that is arranged, intended, or designed to be used except for one (1) or more of the uses listed in §§ 330 through 349

330 5 The following uses shall be permitted as a matter of right in an R-4 District

(a) Any use permitted in R-3 Districts under § 320 3,

(e) The conversion of a building or other structure existing before May 12, 1958, to an apartment house as limited by §§ 401 3 and 403 2

(f) Flat,

## 401 MINIMUM LOT DIMENSIONS (R)

401.11 An apartment house in an R-4 District, whether converted from a building or structure pursuant to §330.5 or existing before May 12, 1958, may not be renovated or expanded so as to increase the number of dwelling units unless there are **900 square feet of lot area for each dwelling unit**, both existing and new.

401.3 Except as prescribed in the other provisions of this chapter, the minimum dimensions of a lot in a Residence District shall be as set forth in the following table

ZONE DISTRICT AND STRUCTURE	MINIMUM LOT AREA (square feet)	
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R-4

Public School

R-4

Row dwelling and flat

1800

R-4

One-family semi-detached dwelling

R-4

Conversion of a building or structure to an apartment house **900/apartment**

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