

Leach, Deonte (DCOZ)

From: Douglas Kingsbury <douglask56@gmail.com>
Sent: Monday, March 14, 2016 10:40 PM
To: DCOZ - ZC Submissions (DCOZ)
Cc: Douglas Kingsbury
Subject: Written statement in support of rezoning Lanier Heights from R-5-B to R-4 (Case 15-09)

I support rezoning Lanier Heights from R-5-B to R-4 (Case 15-09). It has been a long road for the residents of Lanier Heights to arrive at this point. I wrote the following letter two years ago, in March of 2014, in support of our early efforts in this process. I would like to submit this letter as a written statement in support.

Thank you for your kind attention,

Douglas Kingsbury

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March 03, 2014

ZC Case No. 08-06A

I'm a homeowner of 1814 Ontario Place, a row house like those that are being targeted by developers of "pop-ups". **I support re-zoning Lanier Heights to restrict the height, depth, and number of units in row house modifications and new construction** and I want to tell you why. This is an issue that has concerned myself and my neighbors for several years as we've watched "pop-ups" appear throughout our neighborhood.

First, I should define what I mean by a "pop-up." A developer buys a single family home, typically 2-stories with an attic and basement. A small apartment may be located in the basement. Two living units, max. The home is gutted of roof, interior, front porch and rear walls. The rear garden and garage are sacrificed so that the footprint of the building can be extended back to the alley. The attic is expanded into a full 3rd floor and a 4th and perhaps a 5th floor are added. In front, the garden and porch are sacrificed to provide for multiple entryways and sometimes excavated to provide patio space for the basement apartment. The expanded space is configured to contain as many as 7 condominiums. An exercise in maximizing saleable housing units.

The new building is substantially larger than the pre-existing home and dramatically effects it's immediate neighbors in a number of detrimental ways:

1. **SUNLIGHT.** As an unbroken rectangular box, 5-stories high, and running the full depth of the lot, a "pop-up" blocks a good deal of sunlight from it's neighbors to either side. The amount of light making it's way into the few exterior windows of neighboring row houses is restricted, making the interiors even darker than they already tend to be. Gardens maintained for decades will no longer be viable. Solar power units on a row house may be severely affected by a neighboring "pop-up" that rises two-stories above, blocking their access to sunlight.
2. **PARKING.** The new buildings are not providing enough parking for the housing units they are creating. The width of the lot allows for at most two parking spaces, while there may be as many as 7 units in a single pop-up. This adds to increased pressure on street parking. I do not own a car, yet lack of street parking is already an issue when I rent a car, have out-of-town visitors, or tradesmen doing work on my property.
3. **TRANQUILITY.** In my row-house, I share walls on either side with a single family home, and a floor with our basement apartment below - 3 adjacent households. With three adjacent households, the noise level is acceptable, It's not unusual to hear voices, footsteps, music or TV, but it is rare that it is distracting. If I find it annoying I can find silence in another location in my home. With a "pop-up" of 7 units, 4 of which would share my walls, on either side of me, I would have a total of 9 adjacent households. The interior noise from

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home that I could escape to. In addition, multiplying the number of units in a building also multiplies the number of users for remaining outdoor space, increasing the ambient noise in the neighborhood.

4. **SPACE.** The rowhouses in Lanier Heights were all designed with small back yards. They are typically fenced off one from another, yet they each take advantage of the openness of the contiguous space that runs across the back yards. Looking out of rear second floor windows one has a 180-degree view of open space across backyards and garage roofs. A "pop-up" creates a wall, 5-stories high, bounding it's neighbors' backyards. A "pop-up" on either side of a ground level patio would create the effect of sitting at the bottom of a deep airshaft.
5. **Privacy.** Some "pop-ups" have balconies and roof-top decks, creating the potential for multiple parties to overlook what once was a private back yard.
6. **culture.** Lanier Heights row houses were designed to encourage a neighborhood culture. Porches and gardens on the front of the houses provide spaces for homeowners to linger outside of their home where they are convenient to passersby on the sidewalk. This facilitates casual encounters and personal exchanges with neighbors that create a strong sense of street life, openness, security, and community. The encounters experienced on the street and across the back fence facilitate the cooperation necessary to co-exist happily in the close quarters with your neighbors – that may mean keeping the noise down inside during certain hours, wrapping up outdoor parties at a reasonable hour, keeping an eye on your neighbors' house while they're out-of-town or not allowing the dog to sit outside and bark unattended. The elimination of these encounters creates a sterile, unfriendly environment.
7. **CHARM.** Let's not pretend that a good deal of the attraction of Lanier Heights is it's "charm." The mature tree-lined streets, the porches, parks, residents' front gardens, and street life all contribute, but the architecture provides an important "stage" for it all. We're lucky to live on streets where the houses all relate to one another, in style, materials, details, and scale. It gives the neighborhood a sense of order, of calmness, stability – and "charm." "Charm" is a rare quality and as Mark Twain said about land, "they ain't making more of it." Perhaps what most distresses me about "pop-ups" is that their designs at best do nothing to improve the aesthetics of the neighborhood, at worst they erase them. They cater to buyers who are attracted to the "charm" of Lanier Heights, yet their renovations ignore charm in favor of maximizing saleable units. They strip off front porches, yards, cornices, dormers, and architecture details. What they put in place is little more than cheap knock-off surface decoration on the resulting rectangular box. It speaks of maximizing profits instead of creating a well designed, well crafted building that enhances the existing neighborhood.

I would also like to address the specific points made by those in favor of neighborhood pop-ups:

1. "Some of the people who tried to turn Lanier Heights into a historic district a few years ago now are trying to impose new restrictions on homeowners."
 - a. I did not have anything to do with the historic district episode, but I do support re-zoning Lanier Heights. All of the homeowners I have spoken with over the years would welcome the re-zoning restrictions in exchange for not having to worry about a "pop-up" next door.
2. "They would close the door on a new generation of residents by limiting development of affordable new homes in our neighborhood."
 - a. There are vastly more units, both rental and condo, in our neighborhood than single-family row houses. The developments at the corners of 17th and Columbia Rd, and Lanier and Adams Mill, are providing yet more units.
 - b. The condos in a "pop-up" are not "affordable" by my definition. The condos in the pop-ups that I have looked at cost about the same or more per square foot than a single-family row house. I randomly selected 10 row houses and 10 pop-up condos that had sold within the last 3 years and compared their price per square foot as listed on Zillow. The pop-up units were significantly more expensive than row houses, per square foot.
 - c. New generations seeking out affordable home ownership are the engines that rejuvenate run-down neighborhoods. Like a number of our neighboring homeowners, we bought into Lanier Heights 18 years ago, when it was not so desirable. Like many of our neighbors, we repaired and maintained our homes and slowly the neighborhood improved. There are vast areas of the District that need this attention. The few run-down properties still left in Lanier Heights provide the opportunity for individuals to buy a single-family home at a below market price, and restore/renovate it into an affordable single-family home in a desirable neighborhood. Because developers can extract so much profit from a row house pop-up, they are willing to pay more for run-down properties, driving up their

prices to the point where it no longer makes economic sense to restore them as single-family homes.

- d. Aren't there other groups we should be as concerned about in addition to "the new generation?" Such as existing residents? An older generation with families and needs for larger units? Don't we want to look forward and provide "the new generation" with housing options as they mature, their economic status improves, and their spatial needs expand?
3. "Under the slogan of "maintaining diversity," this group wants to down-zone our neighborhood to eliminate any new conversions of row houses to condominiums."
 - a. I don't object to condo conversions that respect the neighbors and the character of the neighborhood.
 - b. It would be hard to imagine a neighborhood with more diversity of housing stock than that that exists in Lanier Heights today. There are plentiful housing options distributed across a spectrum that runs from studio, 1-3 bedroom apartments and condos, to single family row houses. I think that housing diversity is worth preserving.
4. "This is the imposition of uniformity – the exact opposite of diversity."
 - a. Lanier Heights is far from uniform as it stands – in either age, sex, family status, household size, financial means, or race of the residents, their housing options, or architecture of the neighborhood. It is difficult to imagine a more diverse neighborhood. In fact, it's diversity was one of the things that first attracted us to Lanier Heights in the first place, and keeps us here.
5. "If this small group succeeds, only the very wealthy will have a chance of owning a home in our neighborhood. Everyone else will be locked out."
 - a. I appreciate the broad economic diversity currently present in Lanier Heights. I am concerned that this economic diversity is threatened by Lanier Height's increasing housing costs. But these high-priced Pop-ups do nothing to provide housing for those of lower economic status in our neighborhood. You have to be fairly affluent to buy one of these pop-up condos.
6. "Those who are already homeowners will lose a significant amount of control over their homes – and probably see a big drop in the value of their property."
 - a. Lose a significant amount of control over their homes – maybe. I haven't noticed many homeowners, who live in the property as their home, bumping their house up two floors or expanding the footprint of their house to fill their lot. But I can state that most of them are worried about having that happen next door. As stated above, I believe a majority of row house owners who occupy the property would be glad to re-zone for the security of knowing that neighboring pop-up negatively impacts their home.
 - b. To the contrary, I believe it is pop-ups that will decrease the value of Lanier Heights row homes, in terms of:
 - i. SUNLIGHT
 - ii. PARKING
 - iii. TRANQUILITY
 - iv. SPACE
 - v. PRIVACY
 - vi. CULTURE
 - vii. CHARM

Thank you so much for your attention. I hope you will keep my comments in mind as you explore the issue of re-zoning Lanier Heights.

Sincerely,

Douglas Kingsbury
1814 Ontario Place NW