

ZONING CASE No. 15-09 - LANIER HEIGHTS

**TESTIMONY OF PAUL & ILANA ZUKERBERG
IN OPPOSITION TO R4 ZONING FOR LANIER HEIGHTS**

My wife, Dr. Ilana Zukerberg, and I have lived at 1779 Lanier Place for 15 years, where we have happily raised our two boys.

Our professional offices – *Adams Morgan Family Dentistry* and *Zukerberg & Halperin, PC* – have been at 1790 Lanier Place since 1994. We are literally on Lanier Place night and day, if that adds any weight to our opinions.

We strongly believe that R5 Zoning is the best option for the continued health and preservation of our neighborhood, and that downzoning to R4 would be an unwise choice.

R5 zoning has made Lanier Heights unique and vibrant for over 100 years. It is the best solution to assure we remain so for the next 100.

History Supports the R5 Designation

Lanier Heights was founded in the early 1900's by land investors, who built large row houses for a wealthy clientele. Our home, 1779 Lanier Place, is over 4,000 square feet, has 7 bedrooms, 4 ½ baths, 4 coal-burning fireplaces, and originally had servants' quarters.

Maintaining such a expansive property for our family of four is becoming increasing impractical. The huge, original apartment flats, such as the famous Ontario, were divided into smaller units years ago.

When the row houses on Lanier were built, it was the custom to take in boarders, and many early row houses on Lanier were boarding houses. Later, in the 60's, 70's & 80's group homes flourished. Three large boarding houses¹ later became the Adam's Inn, now a boutique hotel on Lanier, which brings travelers from around the world.

Other original homes, like our offices at 1790 Lanier, and the those on the eastern end of Ontario Road, were zoned C-2, to repurpose them for businesses. Lanier Heights is now part of the Adams Morgan Business Improvement District (BID). Every business on Lanier pays a separate, mandatory tax, used to spur customer traffic and business development.²

¹ <https://casetext.com/case/kalorama-citizens-assn-v-dist-of-col>

² Bid Map: <http://www.adamsmorganonline.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/BID-map->

² Bid Map: <http://www.adamsmorganonline.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/BID-map-MASTER.pdf>

Historically, the size of the row houses on Lanier meant that, by both formal and informal means, these buildings were put to higher uses than typical single-family dwellings – distinguishing our neighborhood from R4 comparisons.

Only R5 Can Maintain Our Diversity

One distinguishing feature of Lanier Heights is the presence of multi-unit apartments, public buildings, and commercial businesses in the interior of the neighborhood (as opposed to just the main avenues).

Our beloved firehouse, hospice, hotel, and the original Ontario apartment building itself, are all on interior streets, woven into and among the single family homes.

The old Christian Science Church (soon to be a hotel) has its entrance on Euclid Street. Even our elementary school, H.D. Cooke, is on a side-street.

This historic pattern of development under R5 (with some C2) has created one of the nation's most unique and popular neighborhoods, where both locals and visitors can find something new on each block.

R5 has historically meant more foot traffic, hustle and bustle, and overall density – an urbanism which we and our neighbors have come to love.

Let's face it, if you want perfect tranquility, don't move in next to a firehouse, gas station (now a fancy new restaurant), hotel, child care, tailor, grocery and hospice – all of which we proudly have on Lanier Place. Only by continuing with R5 & C2 designations can we assure the continued vitality of our neighborhood.

The Historic Apartments Already Stretch from Sidewalk to Alleyway

Architecturally, the repurposing of single family homes into multi-unit apartments does not alter the neighborhood's historic scale. Our original, historic apartment buildings stretch from the sidewalk to the ally, without backyards, and rise up to eight stories.

Accordingly, we *do not* have the "pop-up" or "pop-back" issues that some R4 neighborhoods face. All of the historic apartment houses, and even our historic firehouse, "pop-back" to the alley. After conversion to multi-units, the row house are shorter than the neighboring apartment buildings, and continue to provide green space in their backyards.

Recent Renovations have been Incredibly Beneficial

In past decades, very little construction or refurbishment of note occurred on Lanier. What was done, sadly, was often not inspired architecture.

Prior to the current real estate boom, many of the original row houses had fallen into a state of disrepair and neglect. After a long period of stagnation, Lanier is *finally* getting some investment to refurbish its older buildings, while increasing the overall housing stock.

The row houses on Lanier which have been converted from single family homes into multi-family units have employed good design and quality materials. Facades have been preserved and restored. The quality of the recent renovations far surpasses those of prior decades.

Indeed, a recurring complaint has been that the new renovations are a little too nice, with their fancy countertops and tall ceilings, pricing out average buyers. These critics might consider what the cost of renovated properties would be if refurbishments created new single family mansions.

A Number of the Original Single-Family Homes are in Poor Condition

The major structural components of original row houses on Lanier have reached or exceeded their normal expected useful life. Capital investment is needed to preserve these structures for future generations.

Our home at 1779 Lanier suffered three major water leaks in the past two years. Our plumber told us that the estimated useful life of copper/cast iron plumbing is 80 years. Our house is 109 years old.

And it is not just the plumbing. The roof, original skylight, windows, chimney, radiators, plaster, wiring, and masonry have all reached or exceeded their normal life spans.

The four row houses on Lanier which have been redeveloped into smaller units were in terrible condition prior to the work.

1787 Lanier Place and 1765 (next to the firehouse) were owned by an elderly woman, who was unable to care for them due to illness. When her estate eventually offered them for sale, they were so dilapidated that prospective purchasers could not even enter the properties. Leaks in the roofs had rotted the floorboards making even walking unsafe. They were harborages for rats and mosquitoes. Restoration of these buildings as single family homes would be futile. The historical details have long since been destroyed.

In general, homes in good-to-excellent condition have been transferring as single family homes, while those in need of complete refurbishment have been divided into smaller units, in keeping with market forces.

The architecture of the converted row houses has been fine. The new building next to the firehouse is outstanding. The height and mass pair well with the historic firehouse. The placement of the building along the south property line makes for a fine view, and the masonry, including glazed brickwork and limestone facade, is first-rate.

Huge Single-Family Row Houses are Increasingly Impractical

We love our home, but it is increasingly impractical to maintain. Sadly, taxes are levied on the present value of the property, not what we paid, and our taxes have gone up the maximum 10% every year.

Utilities have also skyrocketed in homes which lack insulation and were not designed with energy efficiency in mind. Gas, electric, water and maintenance have all gone through the roof.

So it is not, as some opponents of conversions argue, just developers who are interested in creating smaller units. Buyers today want homes which are less expensive to buy and own, with smaller carbon footprints. Development on Lanier today, as it did in the early 1900's, is driven by the needs and preferences of customers.

Forcing people to live in 7 or 8 bedroom homes in the name of preservation is impractical. Indeed, it is the opposite of preservation, since the result in the past has been progressive deterioration.

R5 Best Supports Needed Business Development

Characteristic of Lanier Heights are our many small business, including just on our block alone: a tailor, grocer, dentist, lawyer, barista, chef, day care center, hotel, paramedic and hospice.

However, these businesses, so essential and characteristic of Lanier Heights, are under great stress. Shopping and commerce has shifted to the Columbia Heights mall, and nightlife to 14th & U.

We have recently lost important businesses, including Tora Mata, Payless Shoes, Mr. Kim's grocery on Lanier, Design within Reach, the hardware store, and Stoga Yoga – all for lack of customers.

Local businesses not only provide character, and needed services, but are a source of good jobs and community safety. Many Lanier Heights residents, including my wife and I, live and work in the neighborhood.

Lanier Place is in the Adams Morgan Business Improvement District (BID), for which we all pay mandatory taxes. Our proposed BID budget has more than \$600,000 allocated for marketing and advertising, to increase foot traffic and bring new customers.

The BID is desperate to support daytime businesses, and diversity away from nightlife and clubs, which bring with them their own set of problems.

Down-zoning would work at cross-purposes to the BID, just the kind of disjointed government often mocked. It would be counter-productive to have the BID working to bring more people to Lanier, to support our local businesses, while the Zoning Commission excludes the likeliest regular customers, new residents.

Repurposing older single family homes to smaller units, particularly those in poor condition, will help our local businesses to survive, and by extension, our neighborhood to thrive.

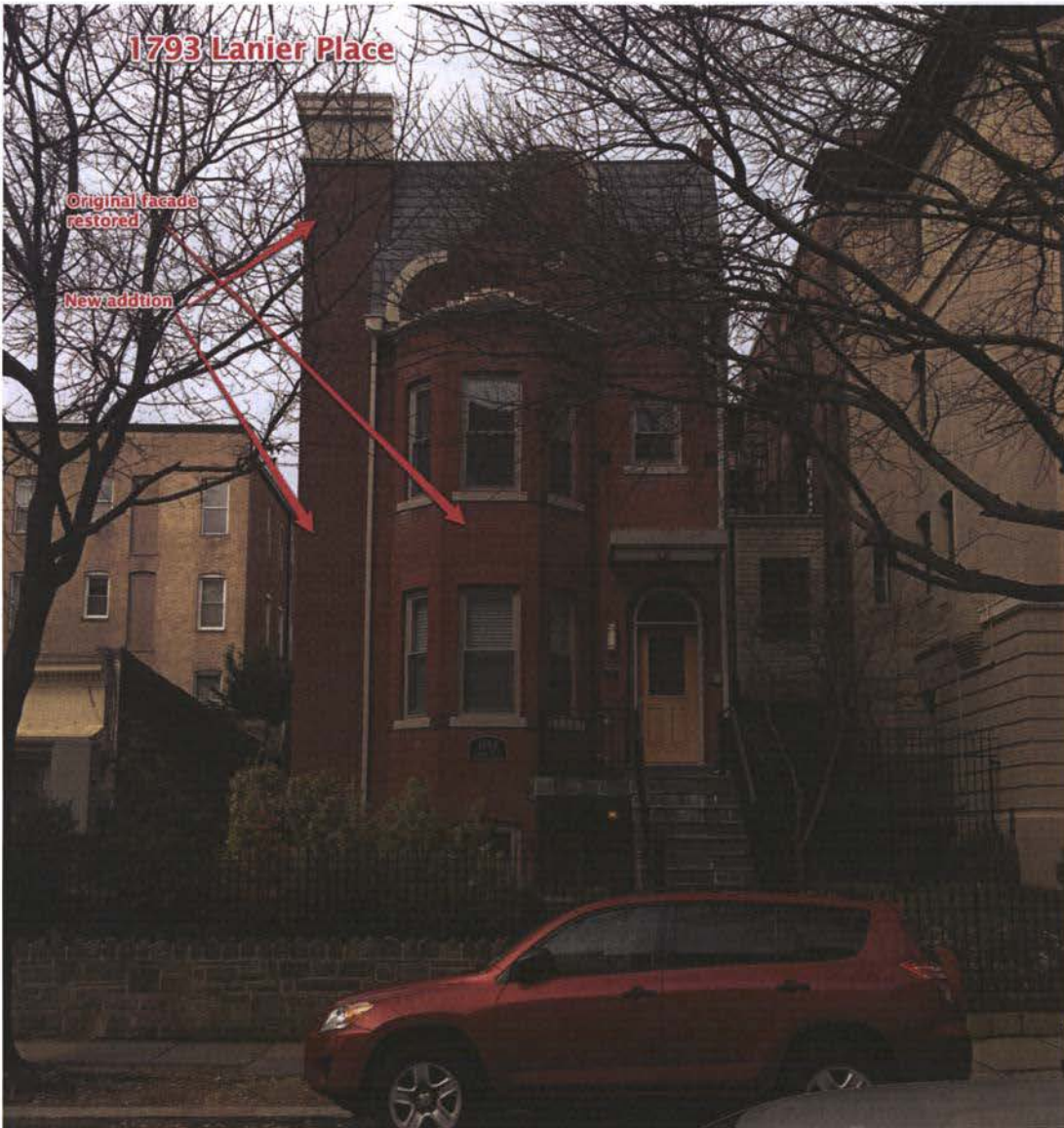
Conclusion

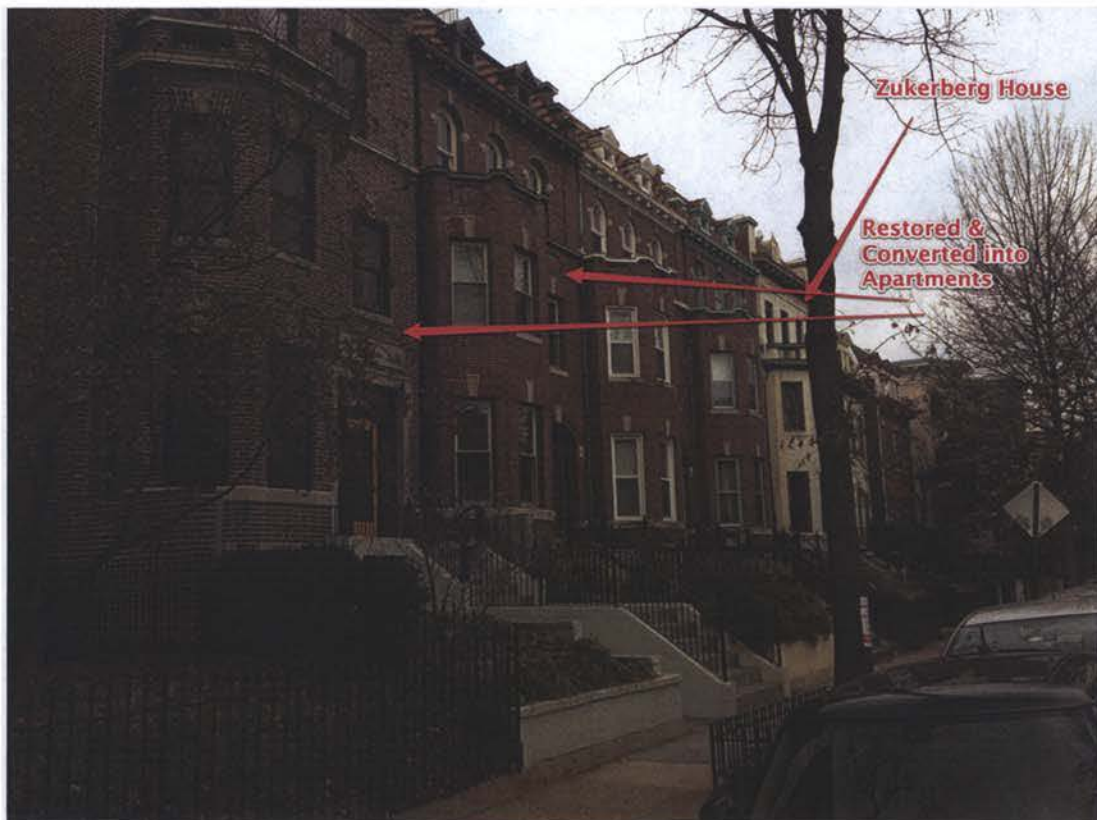
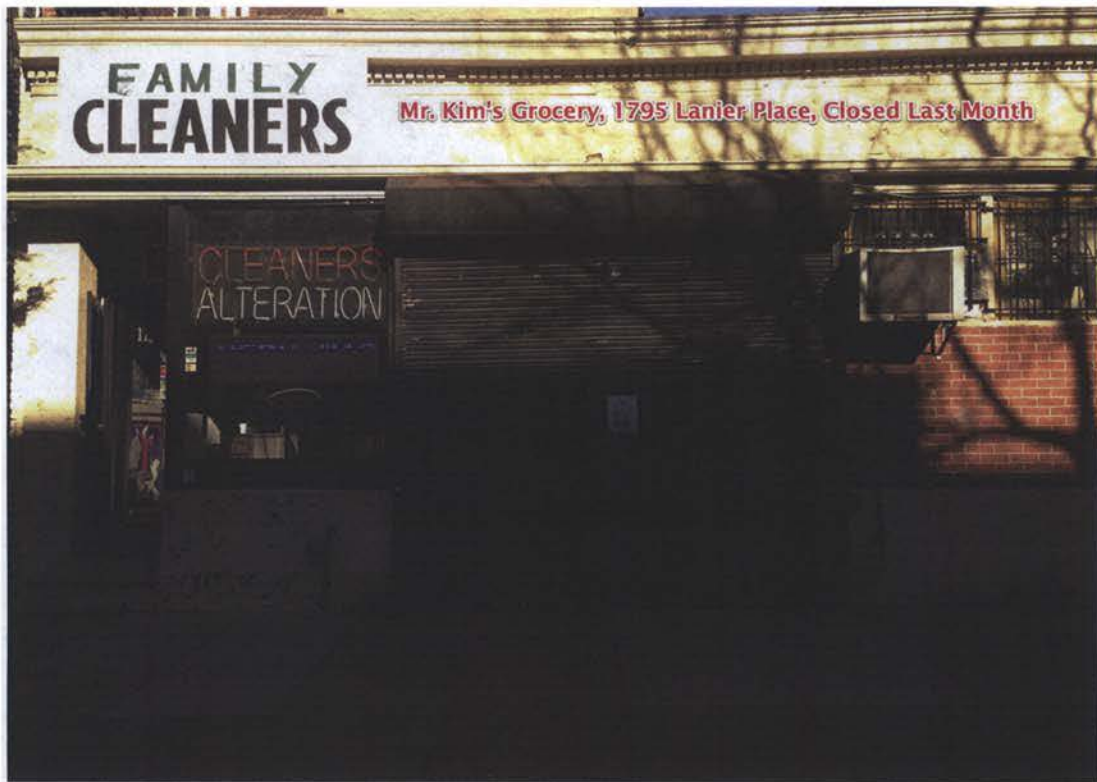
This discussion of zoning changes must be seen against a backdrop of unprecedented development city-wide, fueled by strong employment figures, historically low interest rates, and a growing population – unique circumstances unlikely to continue indefinitely.

We are fortunate to be able to attract private capital to our neighborhood, to help fund the refurbishment of deteriorating buildings and support essential local businesses. However, we run the risk that downzoning will leave us with many unfulfilled needs when the cyclical boom ends, as it always does.

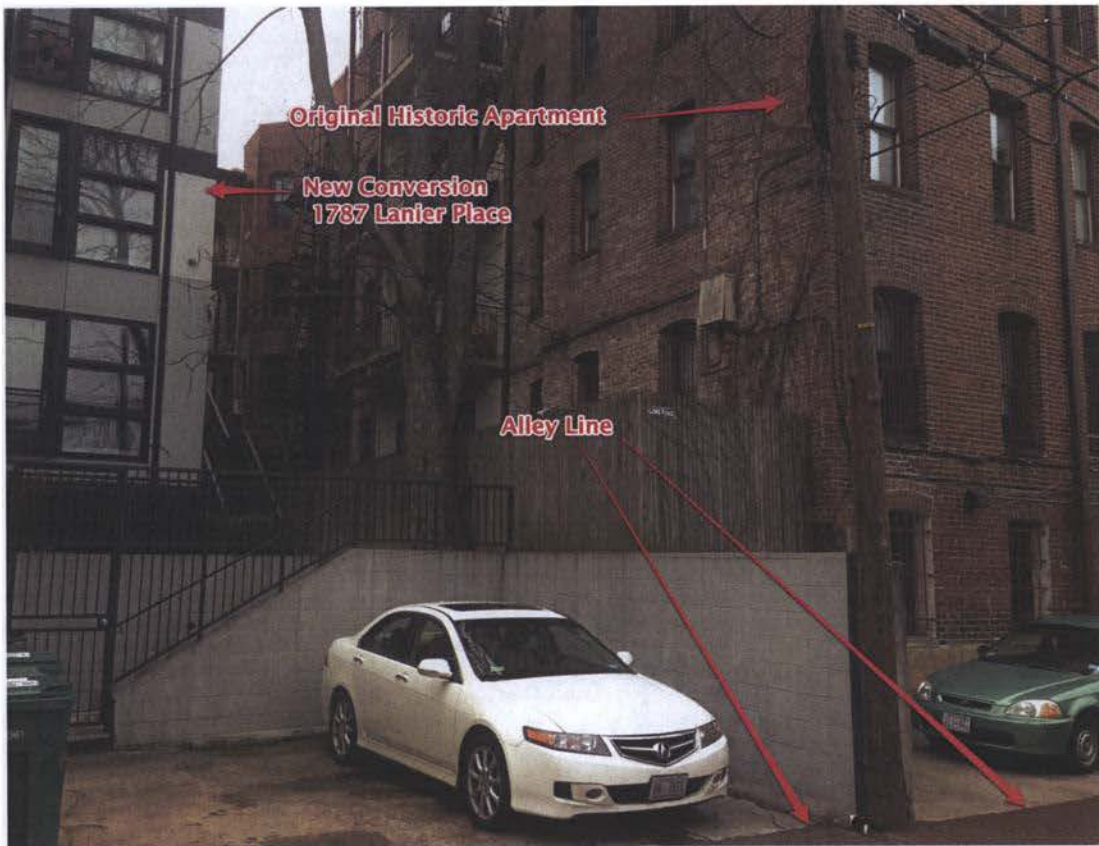
The meddling of amateur urban planners, however good intentioned, can have unanticipated negative consequences. Heavy-handed, artificial restrictions, based on unproven theories, or misunderstood neighborhood history, can stifle the long-admired organic growth and development of Lanier Heights.

Nor should our wonderful, vibrant, and successful neighborhood be subjected to the casual experimentation of mindless do-gooders, imposing their vision of utopia on the rest of us. Let the dictators of design travel to the destitute and failing parts of the city, to conduct their experiments elsewhere, and let us proceed as we have for the past hundred years, to live and grow unmolested in our wonderful and thriving neighborhood.

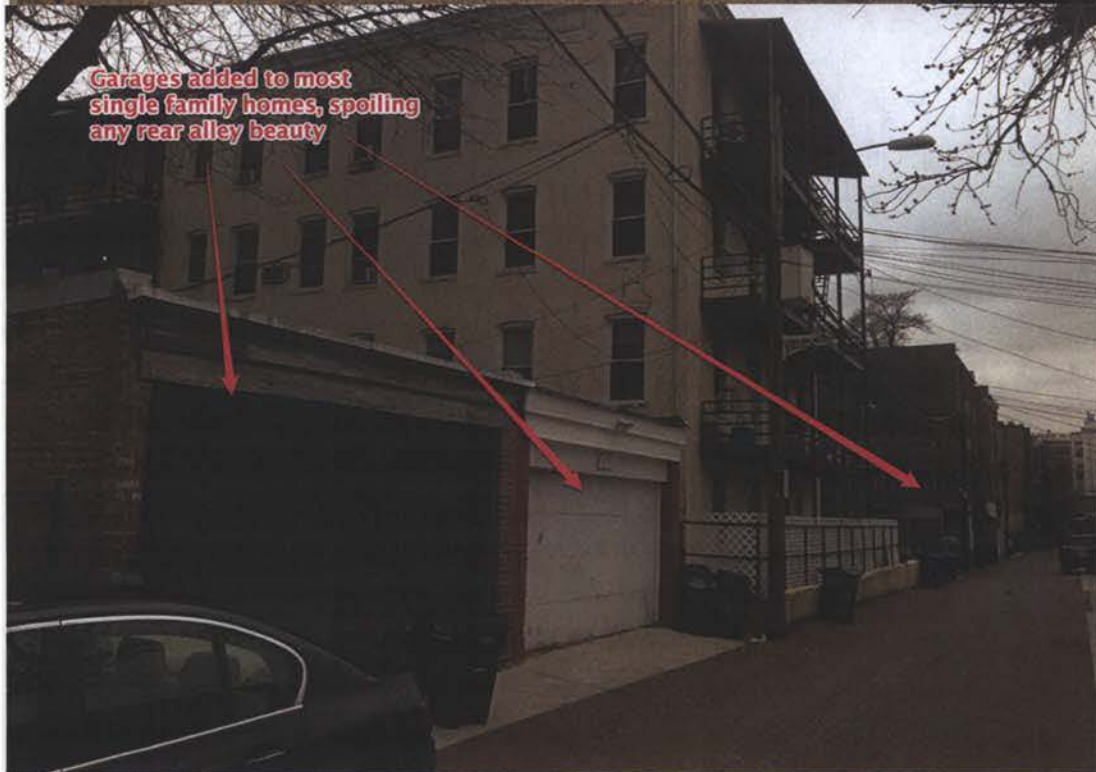
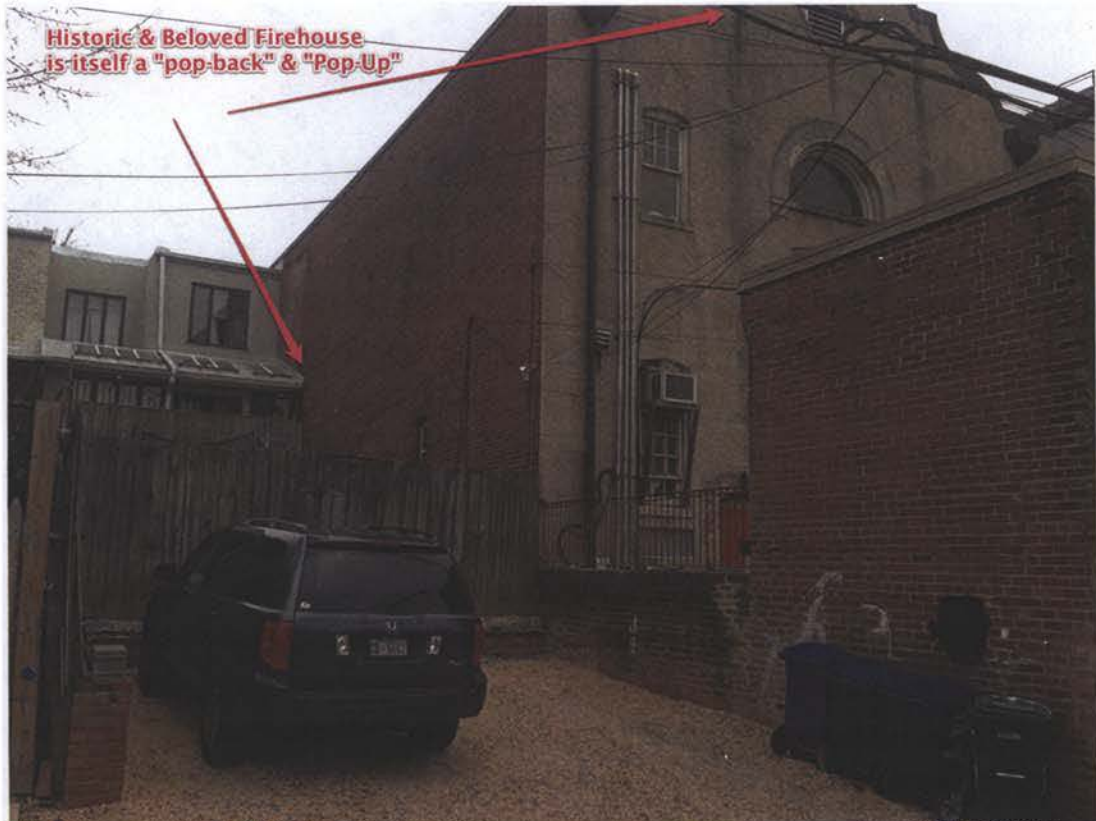




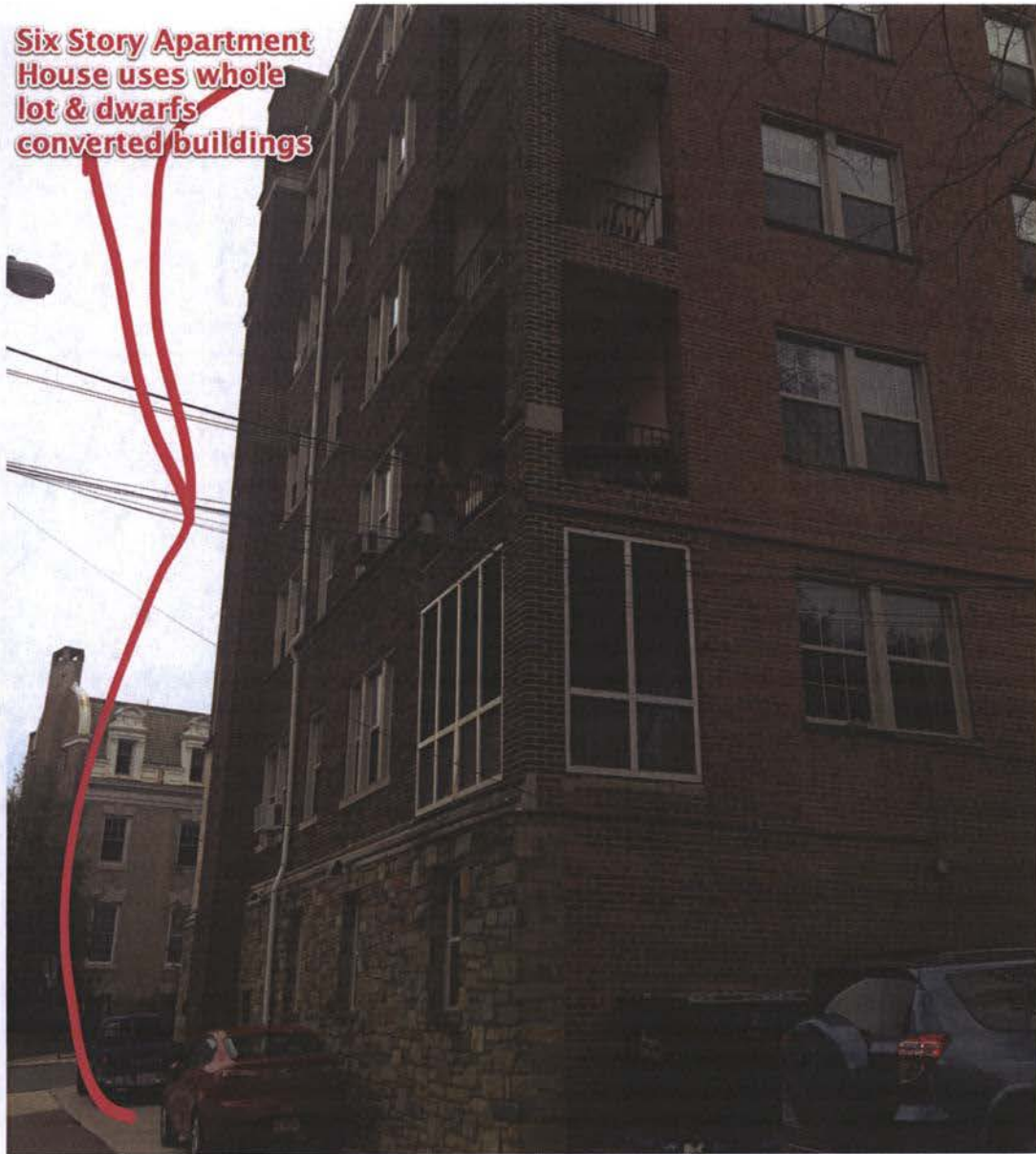






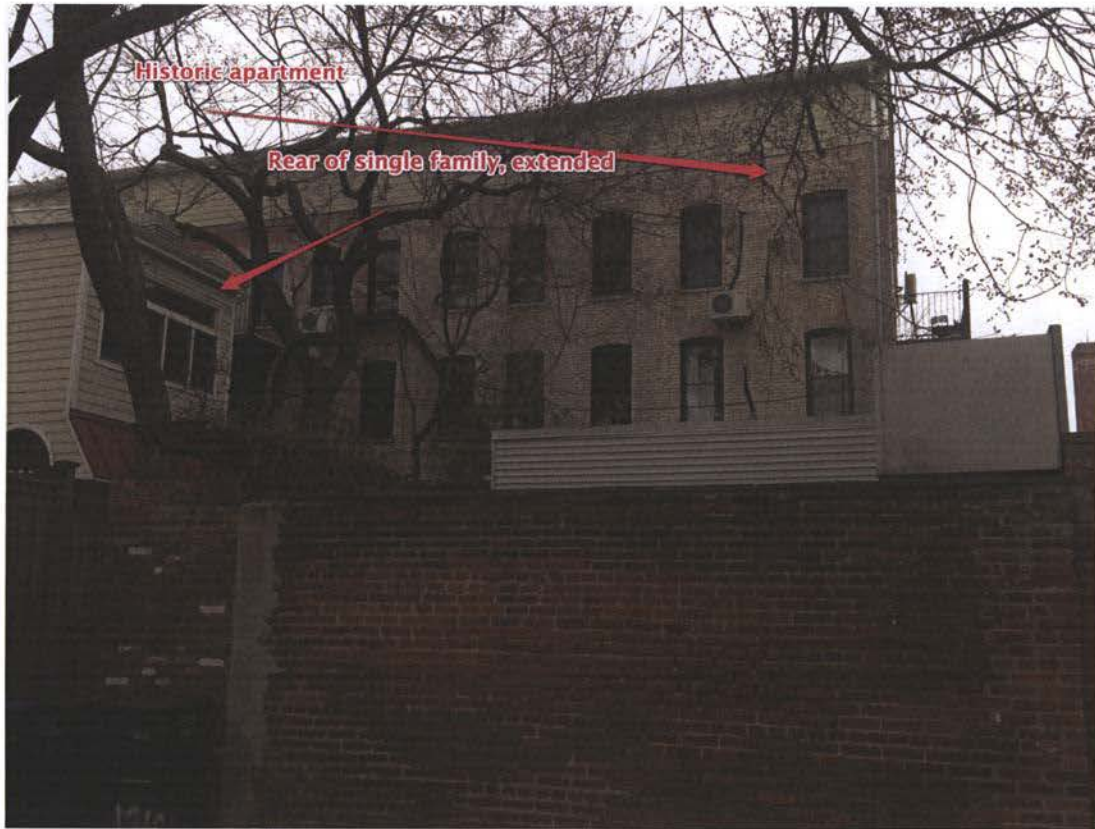


**Six Story Apartment
House uses whole
lot & dwarfs
converted buildings**



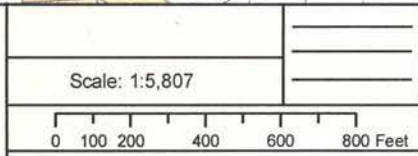
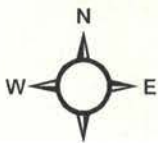
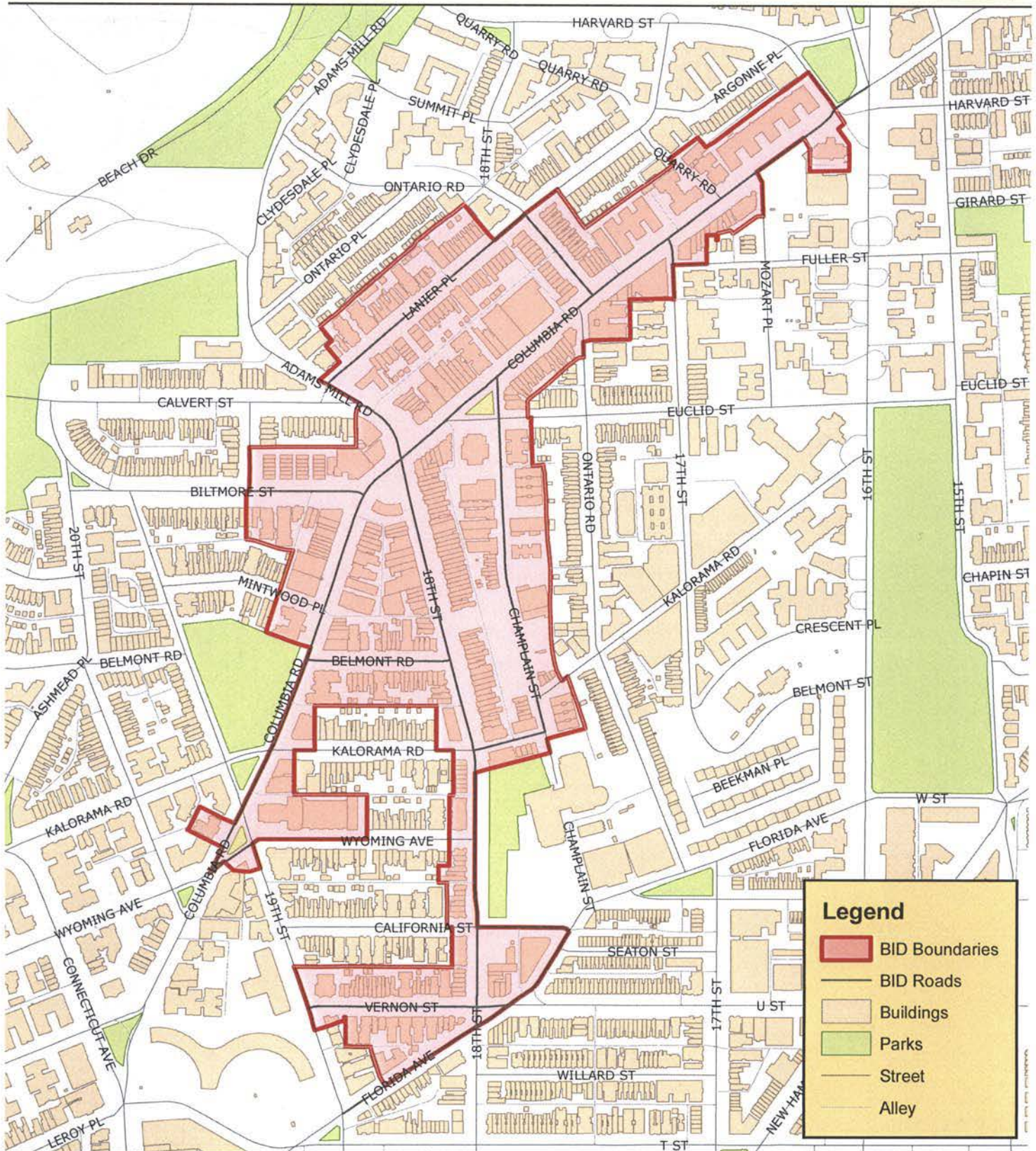


Investments needed, 1700 block of Lanier Place, east alleyway





Adams Morgan BID Boundaries



Source: Office of the Chief Technology Officer (OCTO),
Adams Morgan Partnership
Date: Feb 15, 2006
Prepared by: DC GIS

Map ID: _____

Coordinate System:
NAD_1983_StatePlane_Maryland_FIPS_1900

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