

July 16, 2024

Zoning Commission for the District of Columbia  
Notice of Public Hearing  
Thursday July 18, 2024  
4pm EDT via Webex  
[zcsubmissions@dc.gov](mailto:zcsubmissions@dc.gov)

Case No. 23-24 Eckington Mews 1708-1710 1<sup>st</sup> Street NE Square 3524, Lots 52, 53, 800, 802, 803

RE: Support Letter with Comments

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*Please note: While this Letter (July 16, 2024) has been submitted to the Zoning Commission, the subsection below (III. Support for Eckington Mews) will be the only section verbally presented as testimony (if allowed) during the public hearing on July 18, 2024.*

## **I. My Background**

In November 1999, I moved to Washington, D.C. from Boston MA, where I was born and raised (Revere). While I temporarily rented an apartment in Adams Morgan (Wyoming Ave) for six months, in 2000 I settled into a two-bedroom apartment (rental) at 1443 T Street NW for the next seven years until I purchased my home and property at [1706 1<sup>st</sup> Street NE](#) (“my home”) in February 2007. For employment, I served as President & CEO of PESCC – The Postsecondary Electronic Standards Council, a non-profit higher education association, from 2002 – 2023.

In 2002, I began volunteering here in DC with a new initiative – The Metro DC LGBTQ+ Community Center (“The DC Center”) – and as its Co-Founder, then served as its Board Chair, President & CEO through year-end 2013. Under my leadership, The DC Center forged a partnership with the DC Government through Mayors Anthony Williams, Adrian Fenty, Vincent Gray and it continues under Mayor Muriel Bowser. This partnership enabled The DC Center to open its 1<sup>st</sup> permanent center ever in 2013 – large rental office space on the 1<sup>st</sup> floor of The Franklin D. Reeves Municipal Center at 2000 14<sup>th</sup> Street NW. The DC Center made its mark with *The Crystal Meth Working Group*, a community-based educational and outreach program spearheaded by me that led to a 3-year grant of \$300,000 funded by The DC Council and administered by the Addiction, Prevention & Recovery Administration (APRA). The DC Center also houses Capital Pride, one of the largest LGBTQ+ events in the country.

Locally here in Ward 5 (5F07), since purchasing my home, I have been attending community and/or block/neighborhood meetings held by Advisory Neighborhood Commissioner (ANC) [Sylvia Pinkney](#). It is through ANC Sylvia Pinkney and a community meeting that I learned of this development project (Eckington Mews) and first met Brian Brown.

## **II. History & Communications with Eckington Mews, ANC and Residents**

In the Spring of 2018 at an ANC Community meeting held by Sylvia Pinkney, I met Brian Brown of Eckington Mews. Shortly thereafter in the Summer of 2018, I invited Brian to my home and we discussed the

development proposal. At that time, he was gathering feedback and support; and I signed onto his proposal with my support.

Brian has continued to participate in ANC Community meetings held by Sylvia Pinkney over the years, and like all of us, was impacted by the COVID Pandemic. Progress then continued:

- i. Spring 2023 – *Dear Neighbor Letter from Brian Brown* – At an ANC Community meeting held by Sylvia Pinkney, Brian distributed hard-copy development plans to everyone, which included all drawings and updates on any neighborhood concerns.
- ii. July 20, 2023 – *Notice of Intent to File a Zoning Application from goulston&storrs for Eckington Mews* – I received this notification via US postal mail notifying me that the Eckington Mews development initiative was moving forward.
- iii. In the Summer of 2023 shortly thereafter, I invited Brian back to my home and we discussed any updates on the development.
- iv. In the Fall of 2023, I texted Brian several times and we discussed the status of the development project and its submission to the Zoning Commission.
- v. In the Spring of 2024, I received notification from the Zoning Commission about a Public Hearing on Eckington Mews.
- vi. On Saturday June 15, 2024, I attended an ANC Community meeting held by Sylvia Pinkney at which Brian attended along with 10-12 neighbors. Brian distributed hard-copy development plans to everyone, which included all drawings and updates on any neighborhood concerns. I communicated my intent to submit written comments to the Zoning Commission and to participate in the Webex hearing with my verbal support.

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### **III. Support for Eckington Mews**

My interest in Eckington Mews is extremely high as my home and property are directly impacted, more than other neighbors, by this development on all sides of my home and property. Moreover, the ground level entrance door of my home opens *directly* onto Alley 2; the access door for my backyard opens *directly* onto Alley 2; my garage door opens *directly* onto Alley 1.

While I believe this development exemplifies wise use of awkward alley-based real estate, I am also very keen to the concerns of the neighbors. To ensure I have not been blinded by my support for this development, I have been listening to the concerns of the neighbors; but have not heard a substantial concern (other than increased foot traffic and parking) that has not been addressed. For reasons explained below and upon the conditions articulated as well, Eckington Mews has my support and I strongly recommend ANC Sylvia Pinkney support this project as well.

- i. General Prohibition on Rental – Eckington Mews should be prohibited from being able to offer properties and/or residences as rental and residences should be prohibited from renting and/or converting residences to rental and/or for use on rental websites, like AirBnB.
- ii. Clear & “Signed” Alley 2 & Alley 3 Traffic Flows – While DOT may dictate traffic flow and direction instead of Eckington Mews in Alley 2, the exact traffic flow and plan for Alley 2 should be known and communicated to residents clearly and timely. DOT and Eckington Mews should consider allowing

2-way traffic on Alley 2 as Alley 2, although poorly signed as one-way, is used very frequently as two-way with no regard to signage or consequence. Allowing 2-way traffic on Alley 2 also mirrors 2-way traffic on Alley 3.

- iii. Security, Lighting & Cameras in Alley 1 & Alley 2 – Strong lighting must illuminate alley areas and must be maintained. Security cameras should be installed to capture any activity in Alley 1 and Alley 2 and should be connected to DC’s CCTV network.
- iv. Enforcement of Alleys Clear of All Trash Cans in Alley 1 & Alley 2 – New residents of Eckington Mews will be required to maintain/store their trash & recycling cans off the Alley 2 while current residences have long-stored their trash & recycling cans in the alley. Lack of enforcement leads to public dumping of trash, private spaces to congregate, and private spaces for public urination and defecation. Therefore, all trash & recycling cans must be stored off Alley 2 until weekly trash collection for everyone.
- v. Construction Concerns During Actual Construction
  - a. Legal operational hours for construction (7am – 7pm) should be obeyed.
  - b. Legal noise levels for construction should be obeyed.
  - c. Large vehicle traffic, noise levels, vibrations caused by, and parking should minimize neighborhood residences, property and parking.
  - d. Since vibration damage has occurred in my home and on my property from the construction of the McKinley Tech Football Field and with the earthquake, I am setting up a process with Eckington Mews on monitoring vibration damage in my home and on my property since construction will be occurring all around my home and property.
  - e. Porta Potties – Should be maintained regularly and locked after hours, each and every day.
  - f. Advanced Schedule of Parking Restrictions and Street Construction – While interruption to neighbors cannot be avoided, having advanced notice of any upcoming parking restrictions and/or “dig-up” of streets (e.g. DCWASA, PEPCO, etc.) is extremely helpful.
  - g. Rodent Management – As past rodent management services from DC have been poor, the area should be treated for rats and rodents and monitored on-going as the entire rat and rodent population in the area will be displaced.
  - h. Damage/Impact to Adjoining/Semi-Adjoining Walls – My home at 1706 1<sup>st</sup> Street NE shares walls and spaces with 1708 1<sup>st</sup> Street NE. With both homes built in 1923, and modifications and development in 1708 1<sup>st</sup> Street NE will impact the adjoining/semi-adjoining walls in my home at 1706 1<sup>st</sup> Street NE.
- vi. Maintain ANC as Central Point – The ANC is the only centralized point where all community and neighborhood projects that have an impact on residences is discussed. With a lack of coordination among the projects themselves, residences are left subject to sporadic changes and constant surprise disruptions – which will develop into frustration.

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### **Additional Recommendations for Coordination of Major Development in Ward 5 (5F07)**

Two additional projects are occurring at the same time:

- » Bike Lanes on R Street NE
- » Emery School Renovation 1720 1<sup>st</sup> Street NE - DCAM-23-CS-RFP-0034-Design-Build Services for Emery School Renovation – July 31, 2024 Begin full construction – Safiullah Baran safiullah@dc.gov

Installing Bike Lanes on R Street NE and Renovation of Emery School will directly impact neighbors, parking and the entire community in general. The City should consider:

- I. Reassign parking spots #1 - #12 (see diagram, in blue) to “Limited to Zone 5 Resident Permit Parking Only”
- II. Revert back to allowing parking in Alley 3 as “Two Hour Parking Zone 5 Excepted” and gain 30 additional parking spots immediately adjacent to Emery School. This item would only be allowable if all trash & recycling cans are prohibited from being stored in public Alley 3.
- III. Lock the GATE at Emery School parking lot after hours, each and every day. The gate to parking lot is never locked. Vehicle traffic in and out all night leads to illegal activity and vandalism.
- IV. Lock the GATE at the end of Alley 3 at McKinley Tech parking lot after hours, each and every day. The gate to parking lot is never locked. Vehicle traffic in and out all night leads to illegal activity and vandalism
- V. Replace all DC DOT street and sidewalk signage with clear, efficient, reliable signage.
- VI. Install new street signage (DC DOT) on this end of 1<sup>st</sup> Street NE as a “DEAD END”.
- VII. Ensure all streets are cleaned regularly and weekly; and that vehicles impeding services are ticketed timely and towed. The streets are rarely cleaned as cars and vehicles do not move and are never ticketed.
- VIII. Ensure all streetlights are functioning properly and that they are maintained on a regular basis.
- IX. Ensure leaf collection occurs timely. Leaf collection does not occur due to lack of city workers and lack of attention to this area of NE.
- X. Coordinate better, the activities of DC Public Works, Utilities etc. so that street/asphalt construction is minimized and not done over and over and over again. Constant construction leaves the neighborhood in poor shape with spray-painted sidewalks, and debris and materials always left behind.
- XI. Ensure all street/alley lights (on poles) work each and every day. Some lights in Alley 2 have never consistently worked since in moved here in 2007. Without proper lighting, vandalism, dumping, public urination and defecation occur commonly and go unpunished. Some poles are rotted/rotting and rather than being replaced, are simply and poorly reinforced.

Sincerely,

*Michael Sessa*

Michael Sessa

cc: ANC Sylvia Pinkney  
Brian Brown  
Safiullah Baran

