

Subject: Letter in opposition to ZC No. 24-15

Date: January 13, 2025

Dear DC Zoning Commission,

We are next-door neighbors of the proposed ZC No. 24-15, writing to express our concern at the development team's lack of responsiveness to immediate neighbors' concerns about the proposed project. While we support development of the site, we are writing to express opposition to the No. 24-15 development as currently proposed. Our opposition, and the opposition of our fellow neighbors, stems from the numerous adverse effects in the current plan, lack of community amenities, and development team's unreasonable request for a zoning change to MU-5 (with a maximum height of 75 ft) despite an entirely residential building.

The immediate neighbors have had insufficient opportunities to dialogue with the developers, and in multiple occasions when the 901 Monroe Street project was purportedly on the agenda for discussion at ANC meetings, the topic was pushed so late into the meeting that discussion did not begin until after the meeting end time, after many neighbors had to depart. This loitering has stymied opportunities for immediate neighbors to offer public feedback, while disrespecting neighbors' time, and setting an uncollaborative tone.

From where we sit here in our living room (at 3400 10th St NE), we will, in a few years, be looking straight at our new neighbors at 901 Monroe Street. Once built, the development will be the closest building to our house (apart from the attached row house). Most rooms in our house will look directly at the new 901 Monroe St building.

In November 2024, the immediate neighbors to 901 Monroe Street ("200-footers") developed a Preliminary Survey about the proposed 901 Monroe Street development. The survey allowed us to identify top priorities regarding adverse effects in the No. 24-15 plan, construction concerns, community amenities, and changes that neighbors would request of the current proposal. Figures 2 and 3 in this letter summarize some of the preliminary survey results. Twenty neighbors who live in the ("200-footer") immediate vicinity participated in the preliminary survey. While not wholly conclusive (several important concerns are not fully reflected in this summary), the preliminary results demonstrate the strong opposition to key discretionary elements of the No. 24-15 design.

Our family's personal concerns about the development align closely with the concerns of our fellow 200-footer neighbors, who will all be most intimately impacted by the proposed 901 Monroe Street development. In this letter, we address both the adverse effect concerns unique to our family, and those of our immediate neighbors.

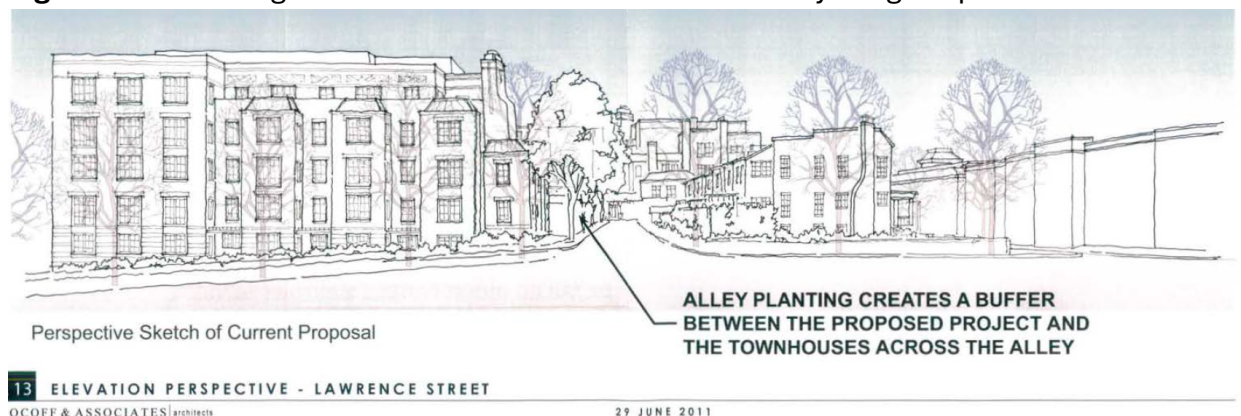
1) **Alleyway as primary building access creates dangerous traffic and nuisance.**

Our families' primary concern about No. 24-15 is its proposed use of the Lawrence St alleyway as the utility and parking entrance and exit for the 230-unit building.

Our 2-year-old regularly plays and wanders in the existing dead-end alley, which acts as a de facto community gathering space for the six families on the block. Since seeing the 901 Monroe proposal, we've feared the worst for our daughter and other children on our block if our current backyard alley were to become a highway entry-and-exit-way for 230 new neighbors. As a mother, it's difficult not to imagine the horror of a vehicle quickly rounding into the alley, without regard for the child on a bicycle or toddler who has escaped out of a backyard.

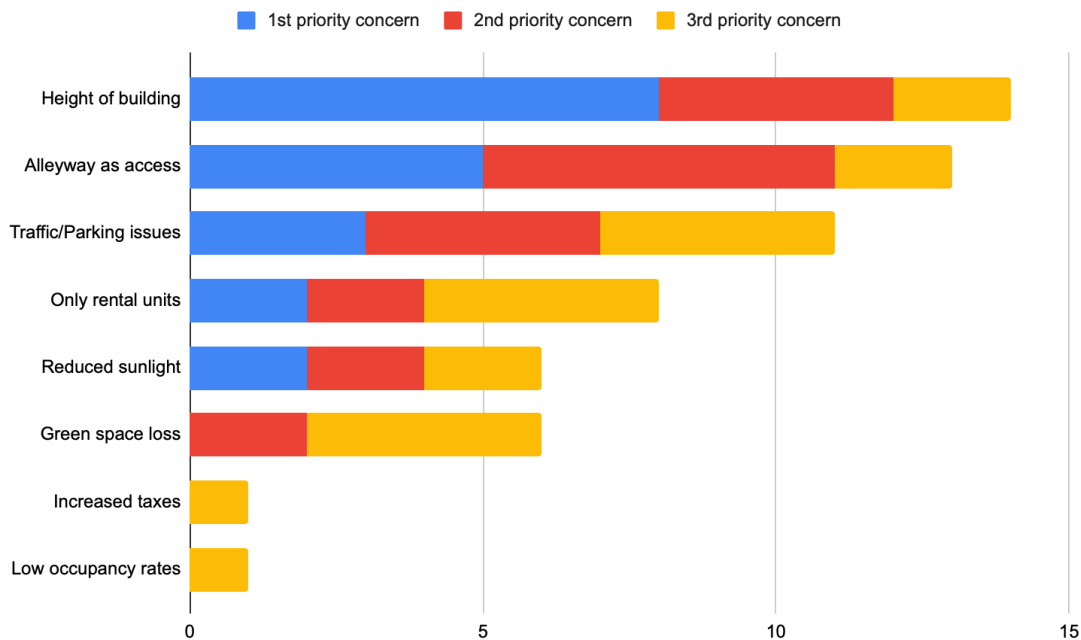
Instead of the Lawrence Street alley, an existing curb cut on Monroe Street could be used for all traffic entering and leaving the building, not unlike the parking that exists between Luke C. Moore High School and St. Anthony's, which has an entrance on Monroe Street only a block away. In the previous 901 Monroe St design (drafted in 2011), the entrance/exit to the proposed development was on 9th Street NE, where a curb cutout already exists. In addition, the 2011 design thoughtfully included a tree-lined barrier (see Figure 1), to create a green buffer between our homes across the alley and the new massive structure. No such thought has been given to the 2024 design. Instead, according to the 2024 design, the townhouse residents across the alley will stare into 901 Monroe's parking lot.

Figure 1. 2011 design includes tree-lined buffer and no alley usage/expansion



None of the current neighbors who share our intimate alleyway want it widened and transformed into a high-traffic entry/exit for a 230-unit building. Moreover, in the 200-footers' preliminary survey, use of the Lawrence alleyway access was identified as a priority adverse effect. Figure 2 shows the priority concerns of the neighbors who participated in the survey. Building height was identified as the top adverse effect, closely followed by the use of the Lawrence alleyway access, and traffic/parking issues.

Figure 2. 901 Monroe adverse effects (200-footers' top concerns, per preliminary survey)



Neighbors do not want to turn Lawrence St into a congested high-traffic side-street entrance. Rather than the traffic of entry/exiting and parking, we request some semblance of our peaceful backyard spaces, preservation of some greenery views, and most crucially, we want to keep our children safe.

2) Building height is unreasonable for site, residential-only, and blocks sunlight.

Instead of the sunlight currently pouring into our home, today's afternoon sun would soon be blocked by the proposed six-story, 75-foot development.

For our family, our backyard and deck serve as our primary outdoor gathering space. Rather than the current greenspace we enjoy, views of the sunset, trees and Basilica, we would anticipate being eclipsed by the towering six stories of No. 24-15, which currently proposes insufficient setbacks facing the most immediate neighbors. Like other neighbors on our block, we are concerned about loss of sunlight to our garden beds and solar panels.

No other surrounding building comes close to the proposed six-story 230-unit development. The proposed development will dominate over the two-story homes that surround it on three sides. The 2024 design surpasses the previously proposed 61-foot 2011 design at 901 Monroe by a full two stories.

Per the developers, there is no commercial portion to this project, which calls into question the need for a change to MU-5B Zoning and raising the height to a 75-ft allowance. The current design would be improved by reducing the height and

number of floors to four, and by utilizing more building setbacks on the building's eastern and southern sides, adjacent to the most immediate neighbors, so that we do not feel we're craning our necks up at an enormous brick wall, nor living in our neighbor's shadow.

3) Only rental units, with no opportunity for building equity in the community.

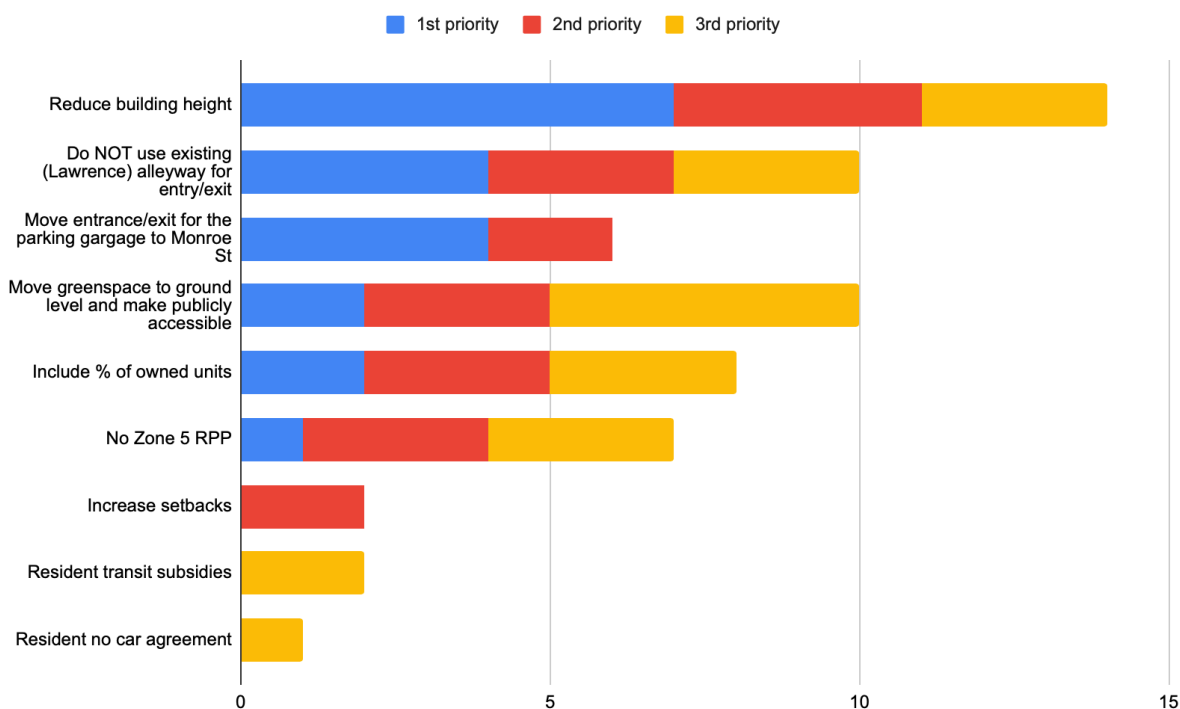
While this development claims to help alleviate local housing shortages, it proposes only the minimum number of affordable housing units, and crucially, will only be marketed to renters. Condos—which offer an opportunity for residents to build equity and long-term roots in the community—will be NOT be available. The bulk of the 230 units will be studios and one-bedrooms, doing little to address long-term housing challenges for families. Our surrounding 200-footer neighbors, per the preliminary survey, also want the new 901 Monroe St to enable home ownership in our community by including a percentage of owned condo units, not merely perpetuating a rental market controlled by developers (Figures 2 and 3).

4) Destruction of greenspace and inaccessible public space. Construction of the proposed No. 25-14 will wipe out the existing greenspace on the site. The former homes and businesses on the site (before they were torn down by the same developers) also included green space. The proposed greenspace of No. 25-14 is entirely inaccessible to the neighboring public, since it is behind doors on the second floor. This precludes any of the surrounding neighbors from taking advantage of the amenity as it is wholly private, not public. Our fellow neighbors share our concern that No. 25-14's proposed greenspace should be moved to the ground level where it can be publicly accessible (Figure 3).

Figure 3 identifies key priorities for changes that neighbors would like to see to the 901 Monroe Street plan. It illustrates parallel concerns shown in Figure 2 above: reduction of the building height (including suggestion for setbacks to help mitigate building height concerns) and eliminating use of the (Lawrence St) alleyway as the apartment building's entry and exit way are the top two suggestions. Note that the request to not use the existing alleyway should be reviewed alongside the parallel suggestion that immediately follows it: "move the proposed entry/exit for the parking garage to Monroe St" (i.e., move it away from Lawrence St existing alley) .

To address concerns related to traffic and parking, our fellow neighbors have offered options to reduce the congestion that might otherwise be caused by a new 230-unit building, such as not allowing Zone 5 Residential Parking Permits (RPP) for residents and resident transit subsidies. The 901 Monroe Street 200-footers are conscious of the unmanageable traffic and parking chaos that has resulted from new developments on 8th Street NE, just across the tracks from us, and would like to see more thoughtful traffic/parking planning implemented for 901 Monroe to keep pedestrians, including families and children of residents and the two schools on the adjacent block, safe.

Figure 3. Priority change requests to 901 Monroe (per 200-footer preliminary survey)



The above adverse effects of the proposed No. 24-15 are entirely discretionary. The development team could make alternate choices. Neighbors' concerns about these negative community impacts have been expressed to the development team, who have yet to demonstrate efforts to reduce the adverse effects.

We encourage major revisions to the current No. 24-15 proposal. We, along with our neighbors, are not opposed to development of the site, but we seek integrative development that aligns with the needs and values of our community, rather than sacrificing sunlight, safety, greenspace, and long-term community equity, while providing no benefits in return.

Sincerely,

Julie Kurtz and Joseph Keller
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