

D.C. Zoning Commission
Office of Zoning
441 4th Street NW, Suite 200-S
Washington, D.C. 20001

May 22, 2025

Zoning Commission Case No. 24-16: Grace Reformed Church

Letter of Opposition

Dear Members of the Zoning Commission,

I am writing to oppose the change in zoning for the Grace Reformed Church and its associated buildings, a Sunday School and a Parish House, from RA-5 to ARTS-3. These buildings, located at 1401-1405 15th S., NW, are listed on the National Register of Historic Places and are contributing structures in the Greater Fourteenth Street Historic District. If approved, this zoning amendment would allow for commercial uses and development within the existing buildings.

The Grace Reformed Church is significant for its association with master architect Paul J. Pelz, primary architect of the Library of Congress, with master sculptor James Farrington Early, and with President Theodore Roosevelt who worshiped at the church regularly during his presidency. President Roosevelt also laid the cornerstone for the church and spoke at its dedication. Completed in 1903, the church is designed in the Gothic Revival style with Cleveland Greystone exterior featuring a primary front gable, transept, gothic arches, and tracery windows. Two decorative piers flank the primary entrance which terminate in the quintessential “fleche” spires. The interior is cohesively articulated in the Gothic Revival style with gothic arches, stained glass tracery windows, vaulted nave ceiling and cross-vaulted aisles. The church has retained a remarkable degree of historic integrity. Character defining features on the interior and exterior communicate the skilled craftsmanship and design tastes specific to the period of construction.

Per the Washington D.C. Municipal Regulations, the Zoning Commission is charged with taking into account the historic preservation of designated historic structures (section 10-A DCMR § 1000.1 of Title 11-C of the D.C Municipal Regulations). Historic preservation and adaptive reuse of significant structures should consider the preservation and protection of interior spaces as well as the streetscape views which are most publicly visible. The Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for the rehabilitation of historic properties provides several guidelines for the adaptive reuse of historic buildings including:

1. A property will be used as it was historically or be given a new use that requires minimal change to its distinctive materials, features, spaces and spatial relationships.

2. The historic character of a property will be retained and preserved. The removal of distinctive materials or alteration of features, spaces and spatial relationships that characterize a property will be avoided.

Decisions regarding the allowable use of buildings should take into consideration the effect a new use will have on the historic integrity of a building. This is especially relevant when considering opening the door to a dramatic change of use as is the case with the Grace Reformed Church, from a religious to a commercial use. The interior of a church, especially an interior associated with a prominent local architect and a United States President, contributes to the building's sense of place and purpose. Allowing a future commercial use has the potential to result in modifications to the interior spaces that would irreparably damage the character of the church as a whole.

The church provides an invaluable, immersive experience into a historic period of our national and local history. Denying this application to rezone the Grace Reformed Church from RA-5 to ARTS-3 will help retain this association while maintaining Historic Preservation best practices to protect the character of the building and its original context.

Sincerely,



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Sr. Architectural Conservator



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