

I am writing to voice my support of 1514 Q Street NW – Dupont Circle Citizens Association’s appeal of a July 18, 2016, decision by the Zoning Administrator to issue a building permit for the conversion of one-family dwelling. This issue has tremendous impact on the historic character and density of the neighborhood. Based on my understanding, the core issue is the basement vs. cellar definition. I am extremely concerned and believe that the Board of Zoning Adjustment should question the Zoning Administrator’s decision not to count part of habitable space in determining how much building can be done on residential lots. We have accepted many large additions to houses in Dupont Circle as “matter of right” when they may not be “matter of right” at all. This problem has been emerging, and was not even recognized at the time of the Zoning Rewrite. To add personal context to this, owners of 2122 O Street NW, a house adjacent to mine, is playing this same “trick”, by not counting the FAR in their basement (officially > 48 inches by definition) as the owners are planning to convert from a single family dwelling to a four-level, three-unit condo. ANC 2B issued a letter to HPRB on July 25, 2016. The lower level at 2122 O Street NW is a basement, at least in part, and countable in GFA and thus FAR. In particular, the grade at the front is well over 6’ from the adjacent finished grade to the floor above, which is the methodology as outlined in ZR-16, Subtitle B, 304.5.

http://dcoz.dc.gov/zrr/ZR16_SubtitleB.shtm

In addition, it is out understanding that cellars are defined in Subtitle B, 100, under the definitions “cellar” and “habitable room” and that these two interrelated definitions clearly convey the definition of a cellar to be a non-habitable space and not countable in GFA/FAR. Alternatively, a “partially below grade” space made habitable is no longer definable as a “cellar” and thus must be counted in GFA/FAR.

Therefore, the Board and Zoning Adjustment’s ruling on 1514 Q Street, directly impacts and affects 2122 O Street.

I hope you support DCCA’s petition on behalf of all residents who live in ANC2B and are a vital part of the revival of families in Dupont Circle. While I am unopposed to apartment dwellings in the neighborhood as I lived in a condo for >5 years, I am opposed to the destruction of single-family dwellings and historic character of these home to the profiteering of developers “interested” in providing more “affordable” housing. I just saw in the Northwest Current that there is a proposal to redevelop Sunoco @ 2200 P Street into condos, along with the Marrakesh building. Do we want to get to the point where there is mass congestion because we’re living on top of each other like ants on a piece of food?

My points below are detailed below.

Historic character:

1. Massing: Plans to renovate are too large in scope and will change the density over time as this sets a precedent for developers to buy and tear up single family houses. Having the mix of single family housing alongside outright condo dwellings make for a diverse community. By chopping up the single family homes, Dupont Circle will become another soulless neighborhood.

Rhythm and character of neighborhood:

1. The tide is changing: Three years ago, the neighborhood, in-boundary school, School Without Walls at Francis Stevens elementary school, was slated for closure by District of Columbia Public School officials. With much perserverance and community involvement, the parents and students were able to rebuff DCPS’ desire to close the school. Looking forward to 2016 year, the school is at full enrollment at 470 students and the incoming class of prekindergarten 3 (age 3) students are 100% in-boundary! Additionally, exam scores have increased year-over-year and the number of students accepted to DC’s magnet high school has doubled.

How does this relate to our neighborhood? Our neighborhood is changing with more of a family atmosphere, which leads to more community involvement and long-term interest and investment in the community. This leads to the second reason below.

2. Surplus of available condominiums and therefore, lack of single-family housing: Given that the condominiums are at most 2 bedrooms, where is a family of 4 supposed to live and attend SWWFS????

According to a Zillow analysis conducted on June 16, 2016, 41 condos were available for purchase (“for sale”) and all were either 1 or 2 bedroom. No 3 bedroom apartments for sale. Additionally, three development projects are currently under contruction (59-unit condominiums at 2501 M Street NW), Square 50 Project at 24th and L Streets NW, and 20-unit condominiums at 21st and P Streets NW. A 2-bedroom apartment is sufficient, but tight initially, but how is a family able to live comfortably with school age children, a temporary wall partition?? Understand that Mayor Bowser’s goal is to increase density, but how do you provide adequate space for families to grow and really support the community, not college students or transitory individuals who neither participate in the community nor vote? Although this analysis is six months old, nothing about the real

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estate market has changed, nor the abundance of studios and one bedroom availability. Cranes in Dupont Circle-Foggy Bottom are evident with street closures on any given day.

3. Families are vital to long-term stability of the community: Families generates revenue for the city, vested in city services such as the library, summer DC Parks and Recreation summer programs, jobs for educators, doctors and healthcare professionals, restaurants, DC sports teams, local merchants, etc. This is not to repudiate that other individuals in the community do not participate, but to support Mayor Bowser's vision for a livable city that is inclusive of everyone. With numerous 1-2 bedrooms popping up, the flight-to-suburbs will be self-perpetuating.

4. Lack of precedent for single family rowhouse to apartment conversion: As stated above all houses are single-family homes. This conversion will adversely impact the rhythm of the neighborhood.

5. Environmental impact: Given that planned conversion for 4-unit apartments, on average, 2 individuals will be residing in each unit, which equates to a 8 total, and will be packed like sardines. The tremendous impact not only on the adjacent neighbors, but throughout the block is evident when the number of occupants is multiplied by the amount of trash (rats and cockroaches) and noise each individual produces. Although this may not be apparent initially, long-term, this negatively affects the rhythm of the neighborhood. As stated previously, the house is situated in the middle of O Street, which is inclusive of the back alley. Therefore, not only are houses on O Street negatively affected, but those on Newport Place, i.e., more than 20 families/individuals. Moreover, massiveness of the structure in the middle of the block affects neighbors adversely in terms of the quality of life. Note that a new 6 -unit condominium building exists at the end of O Street (2142); however, impact is on the neighborhood is minimized due to physical location by default and size of the building land-wise (i.e., occupies 3x more space as it was an existing building, not rowhouse).

Furthermore, I met with Mr. Matthew LeGrant at his office on June 24, 2016, to obtain some clarity on the matter with regard to the cellar vs. basement issue. We met with Mr. LeGrant for 30 minutes and the outcome of the discussion was quite confusing. Below is what I was able to capture in our meeting (no written definition of the cellar and basement were provided by LeGrant):

If there is an "areaway" the height for the purposes of determining if it is a "cellar" or a basement is measured from the finished grade at the midpoint of the property. (presumable to the right or left of a walkway or path.) An "areaway" *must* be no deeper than 5 feet from the front of the house (measure from the front of the house towards the street).

If the depth is over 5 feet, the sunken space becomes a "patio". For the purposes of determining "cellar" or "basement" the measurement is made from the surface of the patio at the midpoint of the property.

As you can tell from our discussion above, the definition of cellar vs. basement was very convoluted, as provided by Mr. LeGrant. There is a lot of room for misinterpretation by DCRA, to the benefit of developers.

I'm not opposed to growth necessarily, but clarity on this matter is paramount to understanding what is allowable. An analogy would be at a doctor's office would be, "Well, your scans show that you might have cancer, but it is equivocal, it could be just a benign mass, or it could be a brain tumor. Why don't you come back in two months and we will check again, because you don't have any symptoms." How would you like that response from your doctor?

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Best,

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Submitted on 1/17/2017 by:
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