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1704 Hobart Street NW
Washington, DC 20009

Board of Zoning Adjustment
441 4th Street NW, Suite 200S
Washington, DC 20001

February 20, 2018

Re: Letter in Opposition, BZA Case 19629, Request for Zoning Relief at 1665 Harvard Street NW

Honorable Chairman and Board Members,

This letter is an update to one previously filed in opposition to BZA Case 19629, which had requested zoning variance in order to erect a two-story carriage house and garage in the alley between Harvard and Hobart Streets NW on a small, oddly shaped plot of land about 20 feet from my property. The applicants have since modified their proposal to request zoning variance to build a one-story garage with overhead storage in place of the two-story carriage. The 15-foot height of the newly proposed garage is five feet lower than the structure in the earlier proposal, and the applicants have offered to install a mirror and motion detection lighting to improve sight lines to the adjacent pedestrian pass-through. Despite these modifications, I remain concerned about the impact this structure would have on our shared alley, as well as my safety and that of neighbors who use the alley and pass-through to Harvard Street NW.

A few facts provide context for my opposition. First, our shared alley spans three city blocks and has three access points: one on each end at Mt. Pleasant Blvd. and at the far west end of Hobart Street, and a third that intersects the alley near the midpoint on Hobart Street. Abutting the alley are approximately 60 houses on Hobart Street NW and about 40 houses and/or apartment buildings on Harvard Street NW. Because many of the houses are comprised of two dwellings, our neighborhood is quite dense. The alley is 15 or so feet wide (i.e., too narrow for cars to pass each other) and the city does not maintain the shared alley. The plot of land on which applicants propose to build their garage is directly adjacent to a pedestrian pass-through that provides access to city buses, grocery stores, the National Zoo, etc., via Harvard Street.

My ongoing concern is that a new structure built virtually to the property line along the shared alley creates a bottleneck at a critical juncture—just east of the mid-alley access point and adjacent to the public pass-through to Harvard Street NW. The placement and height of this structure would make it difficult (a) for pedestrians to locate the entrance of pass-through from

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the alley, (b) for drivers to see pedestrians exiting the pass-through, and (c) for residents to clear snow and ice from the alley during winter months.

The photo below was taken on Sunday, October 22, 2017, just after 11 AM, and shows alley and garage (where I park my car) directly behind the plot of land for which applicants request zoning relief. Please note the pattern of shadows cast on the alley without a 15 foot garage abutting the alley. In consultation with a local architect, J.C. Solomon LLC, I learned that the proposed garage would cast a shadow in the mornings that would cover the width of the alley (see solid red lines for what it would look like in the morning; dotted lines for the afternoon).

This shadow would have several deleterious effects:

1. It would reduce the visibility of pedestrians exiting the pass-through, irrespective of the proposed mirror.
2. It would increase the build-up of ice and snow, making it treacherous both to exit the garage and to pass this segment of the alley by car.
3. The combination of ice, pedestrians, and shadow at the narrowest point in an alley that serves approximately 100 homes creates a significant potential for serious accidents that would be challenging to reach by ambulance.



My car (16' in length) in rented garage space. Solid red lines show what the proposed structure's shadow would look like in the mornings (i.e., when leaving for work). Dotted red lines show location of the proposed structure's shadow in the afternoon, according to architect J.C. Solomon.

I do appreciate the applicants' proposed modifications in response to neighbor concerns; by the same token, their revised structure requires a zoning variance that produces hazards for neighbors. I respectfully request that relief not be granted.

Very truly yours,

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