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DC Fire Codes in regards to planned residential construction

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All:

I wanted to reach out again and this time include DCRA and key local reporters to try to get action taken on the proposed residential structure at PAR0155 Lot 0009 Zone R-1-B, ANC 5C07. It is DC BZA [case number 19967](#), for your reference. As a quick regrounding, District Properties is seeking a variance to build a house three feet from another. There is no alley behind the street.

I'd requested that Lt. Barnes with DC Fire look at the plans and tell me if this plan violates any fire code. No firefighter can safely fit through a passage between two houses three feet apart. DC firefighters rely on alley access to fight fires in row houses and other closely packed in structures; there is no alley behind this section of Girard St, NE.

I reached out to DC Fire for help finding out if this could somehow be documented in advance of the upcoming rescheduled hearing on the variance request. I was directed to Lt. John Barnes. When I talked to him on the phone on April 11th, he said he could help me. He asked me to email him all the information and he would get back to me. However, I was just told by a reliable source within the fire department that Lt. Barnes is new to his position and probably didn't know that he can't help me. He is in charge of deploying geographic fire inspectors and enforcing fire code violations. He apparently can't look at a planned structure and tell me if it would be in violation of a firecode if built.

I also learned that while the fire department reviews plans for commercial structures, they actually ***do not*** review plans for residential structures, they only come in for an inspection when a residential structure is complete. That seems nuts to me. I have been advised to contact the fire marshall. I will do that, but we're in the end game here; the rescheduled hearing is coming up on May 15th.

Here is what we know-- a known and infamous developer loathed in Ward 7 for its practice on "in-filling" houses on the sideyards of existing houses is now preying on Ward 5. District Properties strategically looks for suburban feeling neighborhoods where older, long-established residents bought 2-3 parcels in the 1930s and 1940s to build one house, cultivating the character of a neighborhood over decades. District Properties then takes the extra parcels and builds new, tiny houses on them, irrevocably changing the character of a neighborhood. I drove to a site where District Properties has done this in Ward 7, it is absolutely abhorrent. More importantly, it is unsafe on a street with no alley if firefighters can't access the back of the houses easily.

We've already had a firefighter in our neighborhood say at an ANC meeting that this structure, if built, is in violation of fire codes. Can anyone help us at all here? How do we have the fire department look at this residential plan and officially weigh in before it is built and it is too late?

This feels like a David and Goliath battle here and I'm not sure why developers have so much power in this city. District Properties has purposely and willfully blighted the property they purchased so as to better make their case that they can "improve" it (please see attached). As a homeowner, I am truly feeling powerless. **Kelly/Nolan-- I'd also like to request a meeting with someone on Councilmember McDuffie's staff to better understand and ask questions about two things--**

- 1) Is there any DC law in place that requires that property owners/realtors specify in MLS listings that a "house" for sale is actually more than one parcel of land? During the April 10th BZA hearing, [case number 19967](#), Board of Zoning Adjustment District of Columbia **expect you to** Commissioner Hill made a statement that gave me pause. He said "what do these residents expect you to do? It's your property, you own it. They just expect you not to build anything on it?" Well, I can assure you that as

neighbors of that property, we watched that listing very closely, excitedly hoping that we may soon get another young family to continue bringing joy to our little neighborhood. The house at 2431 Girard St. NE sat vacant for years. The MLS listing never mentioned anything about it being three individual parcels of land, each with the potential to be built on. If it had, don't you think we would have purchased the parcel closest to us? If realtors currently are not obligated by law to say that a "house" for sale in DC is multiple parcels, I would like to propose that legislation is crafted that requires them to do so. This legislation would ensure transparency and District of Columbia homeowners deserve that since we are surrounded by predatory, greedy developers who clearly have the Office of Planning eager to assist them.

2) How are developers getting away with getting residential structure plans approved without the fire department looking at the plans? Does DCRA have a fire code expert on staff? If so, what has that person said about this plan?

I am also working to get media attention on this issue. This practice of "in-filling" by developers is underhanded, sneaky and destructive to the character of long-established neighborhoods. There are many neighborhoods where high-density housing is popular and sought after. Langdon Park is not one of those neighborhoods. Woodridge and Langdon Park are sought for big yards. Prospective buyers deserve the opportunity to continue to have a variety of types of neighborhoods, east of the park, to choose from.

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Allyson

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