

Dupont Circle Conservancy

November 17, 2023

DC Zoning Commission
Mr. Anthony Hood, Chair
Mr. Robert Miller, Vice Chair
Mr. Joseph Imamura, Architect of the Capitol Designee Appointee
Ms. Tammy Stidham, National Park Service Designee

RE: Case 23-02

Dear Zoning Commissioners,

The Dupont Circle Conservancy appreciates the opportunity to submit testimony to the Zoning Commission concerning Case 23-02 "Map Amendment from MU-4 to MU-10, 1617 U St NW & 1620 V St NW (Square 175, Lots 826 & 827)."

For over forty years, Dupont Circle Conservancy, a membership-based 501(c)(3) organization, has served as a community advocate and steward, focused on promoting and preserving the historic and architectural character of DC historic districts, including Dupont Circle HD, Strivers' Section, Sixteenth Street NW, Greater U Street NW, Fourteenth Street NW, Massachusetts Avenue NW, as well as working with citywide historic districts.

Regarding the above referenced case, we would like to offer the following perspective for your consideration.

It is our view that changing the MU-4 zoning classification at the above referenced lots to high density (MU-10) would have dire implications for Striver's Section Historic District, which straddles U Street and Wards 1 and 2 and surrounds the subject site. The high density construction that would be allowed as a result of increasing the zoning at this site is entirely out of scale for the surrounding historic buildings, which significantly contribute to DC's historic fabric. The historic, predominantly low-scale residences and small commercial properties, the majority of which were built between 1875 and 1946, offer a unique sense of place and prime examples of DC's cultural and architectural history. The historic architectural character of Strivers' Section is the heart of this area, which holds significant, longstanding ties to leaders and institutions in DC's Black Community. Among its most notable residents was Frederick Douglass, runaway slave, abolitionist, writer and civil servant. Douglass built the southern three buildings of a five-house Second Empire style row at 2000-2008 17th Street in 1875-76. Lewis Douglass, one of Frederick Douglass's sons, lived at 2002 17th Street, NW for over 30 years. The area was also home to James E. Storum, the entrepreneur who founded the Capital Savings Bank, the first African American owned bank.

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We contend that an increase to MU-10 and allowing a ten-story, city-block massing at the subject lots would overwhelm the neighborhood, obliterate the historic character of the area and be inconsistent with the Historic Landmark and Historic District Protection Act of 1978.

We urge you to preserve this significant historic district, which surrounds the subject site, by denying the MU-10 designation and requiring:

- a scale of development consistent with the nature and character of the surrounding area in height and massing and ensuring a general compatibility in the scale of new buildings with older, low-scale buildings;
- the residential character of the area enhanced by maintaining existing residential uses and controlling the scale, location, and density of commercial and residential development;
- preservation of the integrity of "contributing buildings", as that term is defined by the Historic Landmark and Historic District Protection Act of 1978;
- enhancement of the streetscape by maintaining the public space in front of buildings as landscaped green space.

Thank you for your time and consideration,



Phyllis Klein, President
Dupont Circle Conservancy

James Dudney, Vice President
Kenlee Ray, Secretary
Bruce Frishman, Treasurer
Charlie Gaynor, Director

Attachments

Dupont Circle Conservancy Written Testimony (continued)

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Attachment 1 of 2

RE: Case 23-02 "Map Amendment from MU-4 to MU-10, 1617 U St NW & 1620 V St NW (Square 175, Lots 826 & 827)

Supplemental Information re: Strivers' Section Historic District

"Strivers' Section Historic District," DC Historic Sites

<https://historicsites.dcpreservation.org/items/show/576>

Strivers' Section is a predominantly residential area with longstanding associations with leading individuals and institutions in Washington's African American community. It is characterized by late 19th and early-20th century row houses from the Edwardian era, generally of relatively simple, rhythmically repeating speculative designs. The district also includes small apartment houses and early-20th century neighborhood commercial structures, in addition to occasional individually designed row houses. The architectural styles represented include Italianate, Second Empire, Richardsonian Romanesque, Tudor Revival, and Beaux Arts. The historic district includes approximately 450 contributing buildings, dating from about 1875 to 1925.

This historic district represents an historically important and architecturally rich period in the development of the Nation's capital, as it was the home of the city's early black middle class. Social, political, and religious leaders made their homes in the area, and what is now the Strivers' Section Historic District developed strong associations with the history of this city's black population.

The buildings in the historic district were designed by many of the city's important architects. Developers of residential property made names for themselves with their rows of houses in this area, such as noted developer Harry Wardman, who built a number of his early apartment buildings within the boundaries of this district.

DC Inventory: June 30, 1983 (effective January 4, 1985) National Register: February 6, 1985

Dupont Circle Conservancy Written Testimony (continued)

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