

**Testimony of the Capitol Hill Restoration Society before the Historic
Preservation Review Board on November 16, 2017**

HPA 18-041 1015 D Street, NE

My name is Beth Purcell and I am testifying on behalf of the Historic Preservation Committee of the Capitol Hill Restoration Society. We met on November 6 with the applicant and reviewed plans for the project dated October 16, 2017.

The “Little Red Chapel,” originally St. Matthew's Lutheran Chapel, was designed in 1900 by Louis F. Stutz, who designed other Lutheran churches, including the church at 801 North Carolina Avenue, SE (1896). According to a *Washington Star* article dated May 12, 1900 describes the church as having “a very picturesque elevation, with long sloping roof front laid up in pressed brick, and the projecting porch vestibule, the belvedere built to rise from the apex of the roof” (sic). The article noted that the church is sited "on a terrace three feet above the sidewalk and set back from the building line eleven feet."

The applicant proposes an adaptive re-use of this church into two residential units. The plans available at our meeting are conceptual in nature, and lack significant information in several areas where far more detail is required, including a plan for the stained glass windows. The concept plans indicate major alterations at the roof, rear, and front elevation. At the rear, a modern, three-story structure will be added, connected to the existing structure at all levels. Eight gabled dormers will be introduced at the roof, and the front entrance will be moved to the side elevation with the existing approach eliminated. While we believe the contemporary design of the rear addition is appropriate, and that the new roof dormers are also acceptable, the staff has made an excellent suggestion on reducing the number of dormers, revising the dormers' placement, and revising the form and massing of the rear addition.

Because the relationship of the front facade to the street is an important visual clue to the structure's ecclesiastical origins, we oppose eliminating the existing steps and front entrance and believe those elements should be retained as a principal entrance. The existing retaining wall at the sidewalk should be retained and repaired. See HPO, *Walls and Foundations of Historic Buildings*, 7; *Landscaping, Landscape Features and Secondary Buildings in Historic Districts*, 5-6.

The applicant provided no information regarding plans for the restoration, re-use, alteration, or possible removal of the existing leaded glass windows. The stained glass windows are "special windows" as defined in HPO's *Window Repair and Replacement Preservation and Design Guidelines*, and should be repaired and retained, under HPO's guidance.

The proposal results in a structure that is barely recognizable as a former church. Elements that would provide clues to its original purpose include retaining the front entrance and granite retaining walls; restoration of the leaded glass windows (especially on the front façade); and construction of a cupola similar to the original in design.

The *Washington Star* sketch of the front elevation shows a modest cupola or belvedere. The church has no cupola at present. While it is unclear whether the cupola was ever constructed, the *Star* article reports the congregation's intention to construct the cupola shown in the architects' drawing, and it is logical that the new church would have had this traditional element. We urge that a similar cupola be constructed.

Although lacking significant information in several areas of concern, we believe this project can be compatible with the Capitol Hill Historic District. We support conceptual approval of the rear addition and roof dormer windows.

Thank you for considering our comments.

Testimony prepared by Drury Tallant and Beth Purcell.