

**Testimony of the Capitol Hill Restoration Society before the DC Historic Preservation
Review Board March 24, 2016
HPA 16-104 1120 Park Street, NE**

My name is Beth Purcell and I am testifying on behalf of the Capitol Hill Restoration Society's Historic Preservation Committee. Thank you for letting us share our views on this project. The Historic Preservation Committee reviewed the plans for the project dated February 25, 2016. The project calls for building a new garage with a roof deck.

On November 19, 2015, HPRB approved a roof deck on a new garage at 134 11th Street, NE (HPA-15-633). The Board found the concept to be compatible with the Capitol Hill Historic District with the condition that the applicant work with staff on the design so that it follows traditional building patterns more closely and delegated final approval to staff. Nevertheless, we believe that a garage roof deck visible from inside the alley, as this garage roof deck would be, is not compatible with the Capitol Hill Historic District. Alleys are some of the best-preserved spaces on Capitol Hill; while long neglected in some cases, this has allowed the original elevations, windows and doors to remain intact. A recent HPO publication notes that Capitol Hill has a significant number of private garages and describes them:

The private garage tends to be a modest, one story brick structure with single-bay openings for a single car and located at the rear of residential lots and facing the alley. Garage buildings are either freestanding or attached and built independently or together in rows. ...

Building Style and Characteristics: The standard garage form—a small, one-story, single-bay structure—was fully developed and widely built by the 1910s. Typically, the garage is purely utilitarian with a garage door opening on the front, sometimes a window on one side wall, flat roof, and little or no ornamentation. Garages were built as freestanding structures and as attached structures, both independently and together. HPO, *DC Historic Alley Buildings Survey*, 21, 22.

Garages are a historic building form worthy of respect. Key characteristics of historic garages are that they are one-story and utilitarian. The proposed roof deck conflicts with both characteristics:

- (1) It would add a roof deck, a second story in effect, and
- (2) it would compromise the utilitarian character of the alley by introducing a recreation space.

Adding a roof deck to an existing garage or building a new garage with a roof deck raise the same issues on preserving the alley scape, and the views inside alleys. HPO's *DC Historic Alley Buildings Survey* (p. 22) shows the one-story brick garage at the rear of 622 A Street, NE, built in 1902 as an example of a historic garage, a garage that would be compromised by adding a roof deck. The garage at 622 A Street is within blocks of this proposed garage with roof deck. We urge the Board to apply the same rules to garages as to street-facing buildings - any garage roof deck should not be visible from inside the alley. In a prior case, 1102 Park Street, NE, HPA 15-198 (March 3, 2015), concerns about the roof deck on the garage were satisfied, because the roof deck would not be visible from the alley, and thus the one-story utilitarian character of the alley would be preserved.

In addition, *DC Historic Alley Buildings Survey*, p. 38 contains a recommendation to "re-examine the functional vs. cultural landscape of alleys" and to develop an Alley Master Plan and Preservation Guidelines. If garage roof decks are allowed to proliferate in the interim, with umbrellas, grills, and tiki torches, any master plan will fail to regulate and protect alley scapes. For this reason as well, the application should be denied.

In the current case, we agree with the staff that the materials are appropriate and that the new garage would help to define the edge of the alley. We respectfully disagree with the staff's statement that this is "an alley without a strong extant context of other buildings." Park Street, NE is a narrow one-block street with shallow lots, and a number of lots have no garages. However, the file includes photographs of existing garages in the alley. There are one-story garages at 1102, 1112, 1114, 1118, 1126, 1128 and 1132 Park Street, and on the north side of the alley at 1103, 1105, and 1135 C Street, NE. (10 garages). There is only one garage with a roof deck in this alley. There is an alley scape that would be adversely affected by a garage roof deck. In addition, "an alley without a strong extant context of other buildings" is much too imprecise to serve as a standard to evaluate whether garage roof decks should be allowed.

We agree that the new garage (without a roof deck) is compatible with the Capitol Hill Historic District. The garage roof deck is not compatible.

Thank you for considering our comments.