

**Testimony of the Capitol Hill Restoration Society  
before the DC Preservation Review Board June 28, 2018  
121 Tennessee Avenue, NE HPA 18-430**

My name is Beth Purcell and I am testifying on behalf of the Historic Preservation Committee of the Capitol Hill Restoration Society. Thank you for letting us share our views on this project. We met with the owner and project architect, and later with a neighbor. We reviewed the plans for the project dated May 25, 2018.

Proposal

This three-story brick dwelling was built in 1892 by owner and builder D. B. Gottwals. He also built three surrounding rowhouses at 119, 123, and 125 Tennessee Avenue. Each house is three stories and currently each has a one- or two-story rear addition.

The applicant proposes build a new two-story rear addition on an existing one-story rear addition, creating a three-story addition fronting on the alley. This addition would retain the dogleg but will alter the line of the second and third floor additions' south wall to be canted instead of perpendicular to the main house. It would be clad in painted vertical cement board on most of the rear and canted wall and brick on the face-on-line northeast elevation which will wrap around the - eastern corner to the rear elevation. The rear elevation would feature two-over-two sash and the canted elevation will feature high casement windows.

Alley-scape

We believe that the key issue in this case is the alley-scape and how this three-story rear addition would adversely affect the alley-scape. See HPO's publication *Additions to Historic Buildings*, p. 4. "A new rear addition that can be seen from a public street or alley should be compatible with the design of the rear elevation of the existing building." The Board has made it clear that it values alley-scapes and HPO has dedicated a publication just on alleys. Alleys "were introduced into the urban planning the initial years of the city's development, ultimately becoming an integral part of its cultural landscape." HPO, *The DC Historic Alley Buildings Survey*, 2. HPRB has recognized the importance of alleys and other landscape features. HPRB values not just street-facing houses, but the entire ensemble of the built environment, including secondary buildings, landscapes and alleys. Secondary buildings in the rear of lots (garages, sheds) "should be compatible with existing buildings." HPO, *Landscaping, Landscape*

*Features and Secondary Buildings in Historic Districts*, 10. This principle should apply equally to any proposed new building on the rear of a lot facing an alley.

The alley in this square reflects land use planning in the 19th century; it was laid out in 1889 with multiple, relatively shallow rowhouse lots, and a 10-foot wide alley.<sup>1</sup> All structures on the rear of the lots are one- to -two stories tall, with the exception of one three-story structure around the corner at 108 13th Street, NE (not reviewed by HPRB). The narrow alley and low-rise alley-facing buildings creates an alley-scape with a very intimate feel. A three-story structure fronting on this narrow, intimate alley would overwhelm the alley-scape and also block the view of the alley. In addition, because of the tight configuration of the alley and these properties' minimal rear yards, the proposed addition is not too dissimilar to an alley structure. Those structures are limited in height to 20 feet.

Several neighbors in square 1012 object to the project.

For the reasons stated above, we believe the project is not compatible with the Capitol Hill Historic District.

Thank you for considering our comments.

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<sup>1</sup> DC Office of Surveyor plat of Square 1012, creating lots 3 through 22 and 10-foot wide alley from original lot 1. Joseph B. Hill. DCOS 16/122 (29 Mar. 1889).