

**Testimony of the Capitol Hill Restoration Society  
before the Historic Preservation Review Board on September 28, 2017  
400-418 D Street, SE (HPA 17-488)**

My name is Beth Purcell and I am testifying on behalf of the Capitol Hill Restoration Society's Historic Preservation Committee. We met with the applicant and reviewed the concept plans for the project at July 5th, 2017 meeting and later reviewed updated plans.

The project consists of several components: the subdivision of Ebenezer United Methodist Church property (currently open land), the construction of five new row-houses with ten dwelling units, a renovation and third-floor addition of two existing row-houses, rehabilitation of a third existing row-house, and modernization of the Church, and creation of parking in a stacked mechanical parking structure on the inside of the block.

The Romanesque Revival Ebenezer United Methodist Church was constructed in 1897 by architects Crump & Palmer and builders Masson & Harper. This is the third church built on this site by the oldest African-American congregation in Capitol Hill; the congregation has been worshipping on this site since 1827. The Ebenezer United Methodist Church is individually listed on the DC Inventory of Historic Sites. CHRS was concerned with how the new row-houses will abut the historic Church and the applicant addressed these concerns in their latest plans.

The applicant said that the lots for the five new row-houses have been vacant for many years. The new row-houses will be three stories with an English basement, 37 feet tall, bay front with a brick face. HPO staff advised the applicant to create an "A B A B A" pattern to the five row-houses to give some differences in massing. The new plans appear to offer very subtle variation in brick color and window headers and window spacing on the bays.

The two-story brick row-houses at 416 and 418 D Street date to 1894 and were built for S. J. Block by architect John Riddle. The two existing row-houses third story additions will be covered in stucco and should not be visible. We believe that the new row-houses are compatible with the Capitol Hill Historic District and we agree with HPO staff's first three suggestions on improving the projects.

Our primary concern with the project is the proposed new curb cut, access road, and the new parking structure. A new easement overlay would allow for a new curb cut and a private access drive off of 5<sup>th</sup> Street, SE. Although the Board has ruled that in this instance, where there are existing curb cuts in a square, the Board lacks jurisdiction over the curb cut or access road, we believe that historic preservation issues remain.

HPO's publication on landscaping states that adding a new driveway or parking area visible from a public right of way is rarely appropriate.<sup>1</sup> In addition, the landscapes in row-house residential neighborhoods typically feature front yards with plantings, rear yards and garages used for utilitarian purposes, and accessible by alleys. Where a new drive, not visible from public space, might be appropriate, it is clear from the guidelines that the new drive would only be serving an individual house. This approach helps to preserve the residential character of the row-house neighborhood -- an individual house can generate a only a limited and finite amount of vehicle traffic and vehicle noise, helping to preserve a quiet and residential character. But this situation is very different.<sup>1</sup> The Recorder of Deeds website shows a land lease for 99 years (covering what appear to be all lots in the project, including the proposed parking lot) from the Ebenezer United Methodist Church to Ebenezer Flats LLC, in exchange for over \$2.3 million paid to the Church.<sup>2</sup> Here, the proposed new drive would provide access to a commercial parking lot.<sup>3</sup> CHRS is concerned about introducing a parking lot and car stacking structure into the interior of a residential block where there is currently no vehicle access. In addition to car traffic and traffic noise, there will be noise at some decibel level and duration from operating the car stacking device, disturbing the quiet of a residential neighborhood. We believe that the proposed curb cut, new driveway and parking lot are not compatible with the Capitol Hill Historic District. If this parking lot and structure is approved, it would set a precedent for others seeking to establish new parking lots inside residential squares.

We understand that several neighbors oppose aspects of the project, including the parking lot.

Thank you for considering our comments.

---

<sup>1</sup> HPO's *Landscaping, Landscape Features and Secondary Buildings in Historic Districts*, pages 6, 8.

<sup>2</sup> Ground lease recorded July 17, 2017 . Doc. # 2017076742.

<sup>3</sup> HPO's *Landscaping, Landscape Features and Secondary Buildings in Historic Districts*, pages 6, 8.