

**Testimony of the Capitol Hill Restoration Society before the DC Historic Preservation
Review Board September 22, 2016
629 East Capitol Street, SE HPA 16-630**

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 of the Capitol Hill Restoration Society met with the project architect and a neighbor, and reviewed the plans for the project dated June 21, 2016. This is a contributing brick apartment building, currently with six units; to be reduced to four units. The project is a series of buildings, a three-story section with a red tile pent roof, fronting on East Capitol Street and adjacent to the alley, and behind, two brick additions (one two stories plus cellar and the second one story plus cellar), and a one-story brick garage (the garage to remain unchanged). The two additions would be rented to tenants. The project has many excellent features: It will create a more resolved design in the same volume. The fire escapes on the alley elevation will be removed and replaced with new stairs and entrances beginning at grade level on the alley, animating the alley. The applicants plan to salvage and re-use brick, to the greatest extent possible, which could reduce the need to paint the exterior. The committee had differing views on the most appropriate material (stucco or siding) for the main building's third story elevation facing the rear of the property. The new proposed basement entrance on East Capitol Street meets the requirements in HPRB's "Preservation and Design Guidelines for Basement Entrances and Windows."

However we have concerns about two aspects of the project:

(1) The building elevation facing the alley is very visible from East Capitol Street, a major street, and for this reason we believe that this is a primary elevation. In 146 13th Street, SE, HPA 15-127, an applicant proposed a penthouse at the rear of a rowhouse on an alley. The penthouse would have been very visible by looking through the alley from Independence Avenue, SE, also a major street. The Board did not approve the penthouse.

The plans call for closing a window opening on the third story of the main block, adding new clerestory windows and a new window on the first story. The HPRB guidelines state that creating a new opening or enlarging an existing opening in a primary character-defining wall for a window or for another reason "is almost never appropriate." Similarly, creating new openings is "almost never appropriate." Walls and Foundations of Historic Buildings, p. 8. If in fact, the window on the second story is not original to the house, we nevertheless object to its elimination. On the other hand, changing openings to "improve" the original design would be precedent-setting and impossible to administer. For these reasons we urge that these proposed changes in openings be restudied.

(2) The project includes two new roof decks, with a four-foot parapet. The HPRB has considered roof decks on additions, alley dwellings, and garages. The adjacent neighbor expressed concern about effects on privacy from the roof deck proposed for the addition nearest the garage (not strictly a historic preservation concern). The applicants initially indicated a willingness to erect a wood screening, if zoning permits. In addition, the applicants have offered to convert one-third (1/3) of the roof area to a green roof, which will mitigate privacy concerns.

We believe that with the exceptions noted, the project is compatible with the Capitol Hill Historic District. Thank you for considering our comments.