

**Testimony of the Capitol Hill Restoration Society before the DC Historic Preservation
Review Board March 24, 2016
HPA 16-242 649 Constitution Avenue, 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 call for adding a roof deck to an existing one-story brick garage. 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. 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 very close to 649 Constitution Avenue, NE.

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.

Looking at the alleys in square 867 as a whole, the larger section of this alley, running east-west in square 867, is worthy of a text book photograph of a Capitol Hill alley, and there are no roof decks. As the staff report notes, the garage has been altered, but remains a one-story brick garage. The railing will not be silhouetted against the sky only because there is a taller building nearby. The roof deck will be visible from inside the alley.

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 1120 Park Street, NE (HPA 16-104) heard earlier today, the Board approved a roof deck on a garage where the guardrail was set back three feet from the edge of the garage roof, and the guardrail was not very visible. We believe that proposed garage roof deck is not compatible with the Capitol Hill Historic District unless the guardrail is set back three feet from the edge of the garage roof, and the guardrail is a light material and not very visible.

Thank you for considering our comments.