

**Testimony of the Capitol Hill Restoration Society before the DC Historic Preservation Review  
Board January 26, 2017  
732 4th Street, NE HPA 17-129**

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. . This is a brick bayfront rowhouse, one of eight (718 - 732 4th Street, NE) developed by the well-known Capitol Hill builder, Diller B. Groff (1841-1910). The house at 732 4th Street was built in 1889, within the period of significance for Capitol Hill and is a contributing building. 732 4th Street retains its architectural and structural integrity. This house is within the Capitol Hill Historic District, part of the "Swampoodle" extension to the historic district approved by HPRB on May 28, 2015. The staff report for the Swampoodle extension to the historic district states:

Architecturally, the rowhouses in the expanded area provide an illustration of the building typology from the earliest, two-story flat-fronted examples of the 1880s whose ornamentation is limited to corbelled cornices and molded window hoods, to more exuberant Queen Anne examples from the 1890s, replete with double-height polygonal bays and towers capped by projecting gables, pediments and conical roofs, and featuring integrated brickwork, decorative panels, brick belt-coursing, rusticated sills and lintels, and other ornamental features such as finials and iron cresting. ... The major builders and architects of the nineteenth and twentieth-century rowhouses are the same as those found elsewhere in Capitol Hill and throughout the city, including developers John H. Sherman, John Davidson, Diller B. Groff, and Herman Howenstein, and architects, T.F. Schneider, B. Stanley Simmons, George S. Cooper, Frederick G. Atkinson and others.

732 4th Street is an example of the double-height polygonal bay/Queen Anne houses that distinguish the Swampoodle extension. Fourth Street is a boundary of the Capitol Hill Historic District; the west side, where 732 4th Street is located, is within the historic district, and the east side is outside the historic district.. In 2014, before the effective date of the historic district extension, the owners of 726 and 728 received building permits for popups.<sup>1</sup>

The most important issue in this case is the applicants' plan to build a third story addition clad in hardie plank, immediately behind the front bay, which would be visible from sidewalk on the opposite side of 4th Street, NE. According to drawing provided, the mansard addition would not be visible standing on the sidewalk in front of the bay at 732 4th Street and looking directly up. A few steps to the left and sight lines change as we look over the main plane of the building, set back by a few feet, and the popup would be visible. HPRB requires that additions to historic buildings must not be visible from public space. HPO, Additions to Historic Buildings, 13. HPRB has enforced this visibility standard, including recent cases, 531 8th Street, SE (HPA 16-518) (not approved because addition to the commercial building was visible from public space), 418-426 C Street, NE (HPA-15-150, penthouses visible from public space not approved) and approved cases where the addition was not visible from public space: 518 6th Street, NE (HPA 16-199). HPRB should also follow its decision on 1508 Caroline Street, NW (HPA 15-058, 15-147). That house was one-half of a duplex, another Diller B. Groff house, built in 1879-1880. The applicant sought to add a new mansard roof, similar to one added in the past (without HPRB approval) on the other half of the duplex. HPRB ruled that the proposed new mansard was incompatible with the U Street Historic District.

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<sup>1</sup> Alteration permits were issued for 726 4th Street, NE on 7 July 2014 (B1409663); 728 4th Street, NE, on 21 Oct. 2014 (B1500753).

The applicants make several erroneous arguments in favor of their project:

(1) The applicants argue that although the third story addition is visible from across 4th Street, outside the historic district, it is not visible from the sidewalk inside the historic district, and should therefore be allowed. If this argument is accepted, it would set a disastrous precedent. The Capitol Hill Historic District has a long irregular boundary, and all historic districts have boundaries. Under the applicants' theory, the integrity of last block of any historic district could be destroyed.

(2) Applicants argue that because some owners built popups on 4th Street before this square became part of the historic district, that they should be allowed to replicate these popups. Because damage to historic buildings was done in the past, before historic district protections were in place, does not justify inflicting new damage to other historic buildings.

(3) The applicants seek to piggyback their project on the taller buildings nearby on H Street, NE. H Street is not part of the Capitol Hill Historic District, and will develop according to the zoning rules, including rules allowing taller commercial buildings, that apply to H Street.

We believe that the project is not compatible with the Capitol Hill Historic District.

Thank you for considering our comments.