

**TESTIMONY OF THE CAPITOL HILL RESTORATION SOCIETY
BEFORE THE DC HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD
On the Proposed Demolition and New Construction
At 418-420 New Jersey Avenue SE (HPA #12-562)
May 2, 2013**

My name is Shauna Holmes, and I'm testifying on behalf of the Capitol Hill Restoration Society's Historic Preservation Committee. To begin, we agree with staff that the existing building on the property can be deemed non-contributing and do not object to its demolition.

We appreciate the applicant's efforts to create a sympathetic design by taking cues from rowhouses across the street, as well as their changes to the design in response to some concerns raised by us and the staff. These changes have resulted in placing the front entrance on the forward-most plane of the façade, widening the front door to better fit the size of the house, and moving the 1-story bay to the right of the door. The revisions have made incremental improvements in compatibility with those nearby rowhouses across the street. However, as you can see from the photograph on page 8 of the staff report, they are considerably narrower 2-bay rowhouses with paired windows in a single dormer on each mansard roof, rather than 30-foot-wide, 4-bay, freestanding houses with four single-window dormers. The historic rowhouses also have 3-sided, 1-story projecting bays with a large window on each of the bays' sides, rather than 5-sided bays with wood panels on two sides and below the bay's windows. The result echoes notes from the nearby rowhouses, but is disproportionate and out of balance in relation to them. It also has an atypically located entrance to the basement unit in front of the recessed portion of the front.

The overall mass of the house is taller and wider than its neighbors, and is out of proportion for its location in the block. Large, freestanding houses are very unusual in the historic district, especially in the middle of a stretch of much smaller rowhouses. While its scale and mass might look a little less out-of-place farther up or down the block adjoining a stretch of 3-story rowhouses, this exceptionally wide 3-story house would be flanked by several 2-story rowhouses on each side and would stand out very prominently, rather than sitting quietly and harmoniously among its neighbors, as new construction in a historic district is supposed to do.

The staff report describes and illustrates a number of ways the applicant could address the challenge of designing a compatible house on this unusually wide lot that would be sympathetic with Capitol Hill's historic architecture. These include center halls, sometimes flanked by one or two bays, as well as wide homes with offset entrances and side porches, setback side bays, or shorter side projections. An appropriate solution that we endorsed, which works from the proposed design, would be to reduce the recessed side element to two stories with a simple cornice and flat roof, and employ a change of exterior material and window proportions. Lowering the height would also help. However it's accomplished, the house needs to be less monolithic and have a more articulated roofline.

We agree with staff that the concept is not compatible with the historic district and support the staff's suggested revisions.