

**TESTIMONY OF THE CAPITOL HILL RESTORATION SOCIETY  
BEFORE THE DC HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD  
On the Proposed Renovations and New Construction  
at 3<sup>rd</sup> Street & Massachusetts Avenue NE  
March 7, 2013**

My name is Shauna Holmes, and I'm testifying on behalf of the Capitol Hill Restoration Society's Historic Preservation Committee. We've found the proposed concept for this project to be very promising and appreciate the thoughtfulness that has gone into planning these efforts to design compatible infill rowhouses, restore 236 Massachusetts, and improve the area's landscaping. The design team has been responsive to our initial concerns, and the January 29<sup>th</sup> plans we saw addressed a number of issues in ways that improved the "fit" and compatibility of the project.

We agreed earlier that the apartment building at 428 3<sup>rd</sup> Street is not a contributing building in the Capitol Hill Historic District and see no problem with demolishing it to make way for new homes. The six new rowhouses make ample use of the historic district's architectural vocabulary and should fit comfortably in the neighborhood. We suggest that the design team work closely with staff to ensure that they strike the best balance between being clearly "of their time" while still being compatible with surrounding historic houses. The gate structure that connects the rowhouses to 412 3<sup>rd</sup> Street appears well-proportioned, and its materials and design details too can be worked out with staff as the project moves forward.

Some concerns have been expressed that the row of six 3-story rowhouses may be a bit tall compared with the 2-story ones across the street and nearby. However, we consider the height to be appropriate for their location, where they serve as a bridging element between the much taller, larger buildings on Massachusetts Avenue and the surrounding smaller-scale neighborhood. Because they're situated exactly where the large office and residential structures end and the 2- and 3-story rowhouses begin, they make a good stepping-stone on this sloping block as the buildings diminish in height and scale.

We are delighted that 236 Massachusetts, which anchors its prominent corner, will be restored as part of this project. It's a beautiful anchor for its corner, and many will appreciate its facelift. We also enthusiastically support plans to remove the columned, gabled portico, canopies, and assorted stuff at the Massachusetts Avenue entrances and replace them with more suitable coverings. However, we found the profusion of walkways and sets of stairs confusing and likely to complicate access, especially for the mobility-challenged. Since the applicants are already improving the front area by eliminating the curved driveway, we hope they can simplify the front access and continue improving the landscaping. Also, the manner in which the patio and landscaping meet Armand's on the west needs to be carefully studied and clarified.

We have no issues with the applicant's intent to bring more vibrancy to the streetscape by wrapping outdoor café seating around the corner of the structure onto its 3<sup>rd</sup> Street side. Usually such seating isn't raised above sidewalk level on the Hill, but the corner terrace appears low enough to be fairly welcoming while enabling visibility over the "parked" space.

On the east side of #236, we're comfortable with adding new doors in three modified window openings to provide an entrance with a lift and access to and from the side terrace. As proposed at sidewalk level, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Street terrace is in keeping with Capitol Hill's typical café seating in public space. While the Committee understands the preservation issues related to creating this terrace, we feel some flexibility may be possible here to enliven the intersection by extending café seating a ways further along the building. We would prefer to see this terrace unencumbered with a railing, though we recognize it's not unusual for sidewalk seating on the Hill to be separated from passersby by fencing of some kind or ropes attached to movable bollards. Landscaping and maintaining plantings on this elevation will be especially important to retain its "parked" appearance and appeal, as well as to soften the base of this large building.

The hugely increased size of the mechanical penthouse on #236 was a big surprise. While it shouldn't be visible from 3<sup>rd</sup> Street, its location at the corner of a large angled intersection guarantees visibility from some vantage points, as the staff report mentions. Therefore it's critical for the penthouse design to be fully compatible with #236, for its brick and mortar to be the most exact match possible to those used in the historic building, and for it to meet any additional conditions established by the Board and/or other city requirements.

We support the subdivision for the purposes of this specific project as proposed.

Notwithstanding any issues I've mentioned, the CHRS Committee views the proposed project as an exciting opportunity which promises to improve its vicinity.