

CAPITOL HILL RESTORATION SOCIETY

P.O. Box 15264 Washington, DC 202.543.0425

March 12, 2012

Ms. Catherine Buell
Chair, Historic Preservation Review Board
1100 Fourth Street, SW, Suite E650
Washington, DC 20034

RE: 700 A Street, NE, HPA #12-263

Dear Ms. Buell:

The Capitol Hill Restoration Society strongly opposes the request to remove the stained glass windows from this historic church that is prominently located at the corner of 7th and A Streets, NE. The church, which is a contributing structure in the Capitol Hill Historic District, was built in 1895, and a number of its architectural features exhibit characteristics of the Richardsonian Romanesque style that was popular at the time and which is found throughout the historic district. These features include the arched doorway with decorative stone trim, numerous arched windows, round windows, rounded bay on the front façade, and the stained glass.

Stained glass windows are among those included in the category of *special windows*, which are defined in the city's Window Standards as "a window that creates a special architectural effect, or is a custom design..." Such *special windows* "usually involve one or more of the following attributes: (a) Non-rectilinear frame or sash;... (c) Multi-pane configuration with twelve or more panes in a single sash;... (e) Stained, leaded, or artistically crafted glazing..." The stained glass windows in question exhibit all of these characteristics.

Moreover, the church in question qualifies under the Window Standards as a *major building*, which is defined as "a contributing building that is individually distinguished by characteristics like...visual prominence, substantial size, architectural elaboration...These buildings...typically include public and institutional buildings, schools, mansions, and places of worship or public assembly."

Further, for window replacement on primary (street-facing) facades of a *major building*, the Window Standards require that "If windows cannot be reasonably restored, replacement windows shall be approved if they match the historic windows in all respects – configuration, method of operation, profile, dimensions, material, finish, and any other salient character-defining features. *A stricter standard of reasonableness shall be applied to **special windows**.*" [emphasis added] Even if the applicant were allowed to remove the existing stained glass windows, they would still be required to replace them not with clear glass windows as proposed, but with matching windows.

In short, this historic church's stained glass windows are major character-defining features and not should be removed. This lovely building has been a strong presence

in its neighborhood for over 115 years and is highly valued by the community as an important part of the neighborhood's historic fabric. People who live nearby, as well as many who often walk or drive past it, have noted to us how much they enjoy the church and its architectural features each time they see it, and how they would feel loss of the stained glass windows as a substantial blow to the neighborhood's character. Such a loss for this prominently situated, highly visible, historic church would also be a substantial one for the Capitol Hill Historic District, in which the church is a contributing major building. We have serious concerns about the kind of precedent that approval of this application could set, not only for our historic district but for historic districts throughout the city. We hope HPRB and its staff will strongly affirm the applicability of city requirements, standards, and protections in this case.

CHRS does not understand why this congregation bought a contributing structure in the city's largest historic district with the expectation that they could then remove its character-defining stained glass windows. Their apparent failure to conduct due diligence prior to purchasing a historic building in a historic district – i.e, finding out what city designations, laws, and regulations applied to this property before buying a church that did not meet their needs – and/or their apparent disregard for the city's legal requirements should not be rewarded with approval of their application to remove these stained glass windows. We ask that the Board deny this application.

Sincerely,

/s/ Shauna Holmes

Shauna Holmes
Chair, Historic Preservation Committee