

**Testimony of the Capitol Hill Restoration Society
before the DC Historic Preservation Review Board on August 3, 2017
1108 South Carolina Avenue, SE HPA 17-420**

My name is Beth Purcell and I am testifying on behalf of the Capitol Hill Restoration Society's Historic Preservation Committee. The committee reviewed the plans for the project dated May 11, May 31, and June 13, 2017. This project raises issues on the preservation of open spaces.

This two-story contributing frame house with an angled bay was built in 1885 by James M. Miller.¹ The 1885 building permit describes a two-story frame building and cellar set on a lot 26 feet wide at the front and 65 feet deep. The lot, lot 8, is an unusual shape, wider in the front (26 feet) and narrower in the rear (12 feet), a trapezoid. There is a four-foot wide pedestrian alley on the east side of the lot. The house is described in the building permit as 14 feet wide and 35 feet deep, with a gable roof, and an octagonal bay, 11 feet wide and projecting five feet. It appears from the permit and maps that the 14-foot width refers to the front of the house, (11 feet, the width of the bay, plus three feet). The large bay, in relation to the width of the house, points to a side entrance.

We reviewed the Hopkins map dated 1893 and Baist maps dated 1903, 1915, 1921, 1938, 1946, and 1967 and HPO HistoryQuest map. The main section of the house appears to be the same form as described in the 1885 permit.

A review of the maps shows that between 1893 through 1967, on the east side of the bay front was a trapezoidal open space approximately the dimensions of the current porch, seven feet wide, and 16.33 feet deep (measured from the front property line) and adjacent to the four-foot pedestrian alley. It appears that the porch may not an original design solution because it does not appear on any of these maps, and the porch construction suggests twentieth-century building practices (machine-made brick foundation and dimension lumber). However, the porch provides a recessed side entrance and outdoor space. The existing two-story porch with roof deck, pulled back approximately 7.5 feet from the front of the bay, respects the historic open space on the lot, complements the adjacent pedestrian alley, and balances the house on the lot. The HPRB has recognized that space can be character-defining, and for this reason has protected doglegs and horse-trots. 316 G Street, NE (HPA 17-227) and 108-110 8th Street, NE (HPA 16-694). HPRB's "Porches and Steps on Historic Buildings" states that altering or removing an existing front porch "change the character of a building and are almost never appropriate." Similarly, "Enclosing a front porch is rarely acceptable because it drastically alters the appearance of the porch and the main facade of the building."

¹ DC Building permit # 93 (12 July 1885).

p. 7. While this publication refers to historic porches, it supports retaining the historic open space on the lot and porch on this house.

The June plans improve on the earlier plans by pulling the proposed infill back three feet. The proposed second story solid infill, while particularly problematic, would, at seven feet wide, be too small to satisfy the building code requirements for the bedroom planned for the second story.² We urge that the Board direct that the treatment of the porch be restudied, and to retain the porch's dimensions and key design elements. A one-story glass box entry/vestibule might be a good design solution.

We have no objection to demolishing the existing rear one-story addition. The project plans call for a new basement unit and a two-story rear addition has appropriate materials and design.

We believe that this project is not compatible with the Capitol Hill Historic District at this time because of the planned porch infill.

Thank you for considering our comments.

² The project also calls for a two-story rear addition, which will provide additional space.