

**Testimony of the Capitol Hill Restoration Society
before the DC Preservation Review Board June 28, 2018
637 E Street, NE HPA 18-432**

My name is Beth Purcell and I am testifying on behalf of the Historic Preservation Committee of the Capitol Hill Restoration Society. Thank you for letting us share our views on this project.

We reviewed the plans for the project dated May 24, 2018. This rowhouse, a contributing building, is part of a Kennedy Bros. enterprise to build rowhouses in all of Square 862. This house was designed by A. H. Sonneman and built in 1914.¹ The Board has recently approved several projects to modify the tall attic spaces in these houses.² But this project is very different; the applicant seeks to cut a hole in the front retaining wall, add a gate, and excavate the front yard to create a path leading to a new basement entrance.

Retaining walls are character-defining features:

Retaining walls ... significantly contribute to the character of the property and its neighborhood. Typically retaining walls are constructed of stone, although some brick and cast concrete walls can be found. In addition to the material used, the profile of the mortar joints and the type of coursing contributes to the character of the wall.

HPRB, *Landscaping, Landscape Features and Secondary Buildings in Historic Districts*, 6.

637 E Street, NE has a coursed granite fieldstone retaining wall, and is typical of many stone retaining walls on Capitol Hill.³

The applicant points to four addresses with a "similar proposed entrance" in square 862: 619 and 641 Lexington Place, NE, 643 E Street, NE, and 425 6th Street, NE. HPRB approval would be needed in advance of constructing any of these proposed entrances. A search of HPRB's website revealed no HPRB case for any of these addresses. In 2014, the Board found that a proposal to cut an opening in a retaining wall for a basement entrance to be incompatible with the Capitol Hill historic district and inconsistent with the preservation act. 325 D Street, SE (HPA 14-536).

The project violates HPRB guidelines for basement entrances. We agree with the staff report and believe that the project is not compatible with the Capitol Hill Historic District.

Thank you for considering our comments.

¹ DC building permit # 5002 (22 May 1914).

² See for example, 640 Lexington Place, NE, HPA 14-218; 626 Lexington Place, NE, HPA 17-521.

³ Margaret Maliszewski-Pirkart, *Architecture and Ornament* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Co, 1998, 49).