

**TESTIMONY OF THE CAPITOL HILL RESTORATION SOCIETY  
BEFORE THE DC HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD  
On the Proposed Alterations at 1331 Constitution Avenue NE  
March 28, 2013**

My name is Shauna Holmes, and I'm testifying on behalf of the Capitol Hill Restoration Society's Historic Preservation Committee. Thank you for this opportunity to share our concerns about this proposal to transform a 1922 one-story commercial structure into a three-story rowhouse.

First, this property is the last one-story contributing building remaining on this block out of a row of ten one-story commercial buildings constructed between 1909 and 1928. One-story structures are important parts of the development history of our historic district and should not be lightly turned into two- or three-story buildings. The Committee has instead encouraged rear additions or other strategies that preserve the one-story appearance.

Buildings like #1331 dominated new commercial construction in the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century on Capitol Hill, reflecting the changing economics of this period, when there was less call for residential use above commercial use. Relatively few of these remain. Yet they contribute to the story of Capitol Hill, and are important parts of the "sawtooth" streetscapes that contribute to the character of the historic district. One after another, the other one-story buildings on this block have been lost or overwhelmed by large additions. We don't think this accretion of loss justifies dismissing the last of the one-story buildings. Now that only this one is left, the argument for accepting its loss is that the one-story row has lost its integrity and that commercial uses on the block have been replaced by residential uses. We don't think previous degradation of the historic integrity is a good reason to accept more compromising, especially in a block on the edge of the historic district that should demonstrate its historic character. Further, this building itself has not lost its integrity.

The applicant wants to use the same template here that he used last year for 1323 Constitution – the next-to-last one-story contributing building in this block – in a project for which we exercised a great deal of flexibility. That was due mainly to two circumstances that don't apply to #1331. #1323 had an existing rear two-story wall, and was in much worse condition. We made it very clear a year ago that we did not regard our flexibility with #1323 "to be precedent-setting for the remainder of the Capitol Hill Historic District [nor] for the other one-story building on this block, which is in strikingly better condition.... We view our decision [not to object] to be an anomaly due to factors specific to this particular location and set of unique circumstances."

Like last year's project, this three-story addition will extend farther back than its neighbors and will insert a three-story mass where the view now from the public alley is of a modest one-story building. Neighbors have expressed concerns that once again, the integrity of the block both front and rear would experience additional compromising. As the staff report makes clear, this has continued here on a one-at-a-time, case-by-case basis. This is exactly how historic streetscapes, and even districts, lose their integrity, one property and project at a time.

Second, we believe very strongly that that the size of an addition should not overwhelm the historic portion of a building, making third-story additions to one-story buildings especially problematic. In this case, the addition would be over two-and-a-half times as big as the historic portion, totally overwhelming it.

Third, the north-south schematic section shows the sightline from the other side of Constitution Avenue as clearing the top of the third-floor addition by only a foot, which cuts it very close. If the Board approves a third-floor addition, we suggest pushing it back a bit, especially since a deck is proposed in front of the third floor.

We appreciate that the applicant is researching the original appearance of the front façade and proposes to restore the original storefront bay. And we appreciate the condition in the staff report that he work with HPO to determine the appropriate details.

In sum, we're very concerned about the prospect of this last one-story building being swallowed up by such a huge addition. As proposed, the addition would make it impossible for anyone to recognize that #1331 was ever a one-story building. We would much prefer exploration of less intrusive ways of enlarging it so that it would continue to read as a one-story structure.

If the Board decides that one or more additional stories would be acceptable here, the Committee thinks that only a project of special merit would be adequate mitigation worthy of, in effect, losing the existing building. We do not view the proposed design as one of special merit.