

**Testimony of the Capitol Hill Restoration Society
before the DC Historic Preservation Review Board on October 22, 2020
514 Archibald Walk, SE HPA 20-478**

My name is Beth Purcell and I am testifying on behalf of the Capitol Hill Restoration Society's Historic Preservation Committee. We reviewed the project plans downloaded in September 2020 and plans dated October 1, 2020. The nearby buildings are old. The two-story alley dwellings at 516, 518, 520, and 522 Archibald Walk, were built in 1888. 645 E Street, SE was built in 1857 or earlier, and 633 F Street Terrace, SE was built in 1925.

The applicant proposes to add a second story to an existing brick garage. It is important that the project blend well with the older buildings and not draw attention to itself. The east elevation on one option is a little stark, particularly as shown in white (or "whitewashed" brick). It's a wide structure and with a second floor plus parapet, so it's big. Because this is a historic alley with historic garages and alley dwellings, it should be trying to blend in, not draw attention to itself. The west elevation does a better job of blending in than the east elevation. Most of the alley garages are brick with white doors; the alley paving is new red brick; and the alley dwellings are mostly painted -- but are much more delicate colors. Earlier we suggested reconsidering the palette. For this reason the option to use neutral brick is preferable.

We believe that there are two important issues in this case:

1. projection of the second story balcony on the Archibald Walk elevation and
2. The height of the garage.

1. Projection of the second story balcony on the Archibald Walk elevation

The October 1 plans and the plans presented at the hearing today show two options for this elevation. One option is a six-inch Juliette balcony, but the second option shows a three-foot projection into public space, lining up with the tree house in the adjacent lot. The project architect noted that a public space permit would be needed for the balcony. There has been significant controversy, even litigation, as to whether the tree house on the adjacent property improperly projects into public space. The *Washington Post* reported that the tree house extends 20 inches into public space and that the DDOT Public Space Committee ruled against authorizing the tree house's projection into public space.¹ In this context it needs

¹ https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/the-treehouse-that-divided-a-capitol-hill-neighborhood-has-to-be-moved/2016/01/28/b7d8b34c-c5b8-11e5-8965-0607e0e265ce_story.html

to be very clear where the property line is in relation to the proposed balcony, whether the balcony is entirely within lot 845's property line, and if not, the applicant must produce copies of permits obtained authorizing any projection into public space. The preferable option is the Juliette balcony projecting six inches.

If the Board grants concept approval, we request that the order specifically reference approving the Juliette balcony within the property line.

2. The height of the proposed garage. The height of the proposed garage, 23 feet, 4 inches, exceeds HPRB's height limit of 20 feet. The staff report recommends approval because this height continues the roofline of the adjacent alley dwellings. Approving this too-tall garage would set a bad precedent for three reasons:

1. The height limit for garages should be the same for inhabited and uninhabited alleys. A garage is a garage, and all garages should be held to the uniform height limit of 20 feet. A decision to allow garage heights above 20 feet should be done through a public process, e.g., by design guidelines for alleys.

2. Structures on alleys exceeding 20 feet should not become bootstraps for taller garages. For example, the Board allowed a deteriorated carriage house at the rear of 19 4th Street, NE, 23 feet 4 inches tall, to be reconstructed at the same height. (HPA 20-096). But the existence of this over-height carriage house should not become a predicate for approving other too-tall garages on that alley, and there are examples of over-height buildings on other Capitol Hill alleys.

3. This height-matching argument could spread to Capitol Hill's commercial avenues. The sawtooth skyline with its varying building heights offers opportunities to add additional stories to lower buildings in order to "match" higher buildings, an undesirable result.

We believe that the project is not compatible with the Capitol Hill Historic District.

Thank you for considering our comments.