

**Testimony of the Capitol Hill Restoration Society before the DC  
Historic Preservation Review Board on March 24, 2022  
1108 Constitution Avenue, NE HPA 22-173**

My name is Beth Purcell and I am testifying on behalf of the Capitol Hill Restoration Society's Historic Preservation Committee. This house is one of four brick rowhouses (1106-1112) built in 1878 by Richard Curtain. It is a contributing building. The rest of the block was built out in the next ten years: 1102-1104 in 1877 by Patrick Curtain, and 1114-1130 in 1880 by Sherwood and Crawford. See Figure 1.

The Historic Preservation Committee reviewed the plans dated February 8, 2022. The applicant proposes to build a two-story rear addition. The design and materials are appropriate. However, applicant proposes to enclose the dogleg.

One of the challenges for rowhouse builders was how to maximize natural light entering the house. Nineteenth century builders relied on doglegs to add natural light from a third side, in the rear, typically in the kitchen on the first floor. The windows in the dogleg make the kitchen a sunshine-filled and pleasant space. The upper floors also receive this extra sunlight. The dogleg is vital to the massing and functionality of these rowhouses and for this reason is a character-defining feature of Capitol Hill rowhouses.

On the blockface including 1108 Constitution Avenue, NE doglegs remain on 9 of the 10 rowhouses where doglegs existed, i.e., 90 percent of the original doglegs are intact. Thus, the row of doglegs on this blockface is substantially intact. See Figure 1. The Board has protected intact rows of doglegs from infilling and should do so again in this case. See 316 G Street, NE, (HPA 17-227), 1355 A Street, NE (HPA 19-608) and 626 Lexington Place, NE, HPA 21-555).

Doglegs are typically found at the rear of rowhouses. For this reason they are visible in the house's interior, and sometimes from neighboring yards, or from the alley. The staff report argues that the sole deciding factor is whether the dogleg is visible from public space. (p. 2, second full paragraph). The staff report incorrectly states that the Board's rules on visibility from public space are the only relevant rules for additions and that

visibility is also the sole test for the protection of doglegs. This is not accurate for additions or for doglegs. In fact, the Board has stated that roof-top additions must satisfy three requirements:

- Additions on top of a building can sometimes be achieved
- [1] when they are not visible from street views,
- [2] do not result in the removal or alteration of important character-defining features of the building or streetscape,**
- and**
- [3] are compatible with their context. <sup>1</sup>

Thus the Board's own requirements mandate preservation of character-defining features, such as doglegs, which the Board has preserved in the past and we hope will do again in this case.

In addition, there is a serious logic problem with the staff report. The report argues that "In this instance, the interior of the block, including along the same block front, is a jumble of massing and forms, even though from a site plan it looks to have mostly intact rear ells and doglegs." Relying on visibility from public space as the sole test leads to a strange result: Doglegs in alleys with few garages or fences should be preserved as visible from public space, but doglegs in alleys with garages, particularly two-story garages, or tall fences, need not be preserved and can be infilled because they are less visible from public space. This result makes no sense.

We urge the Board to protect the dogleg in this case.

We believe that solely because the applicant proposes to infill a dogleg in a substantially intact row of doglegs, this project is not compatible with the Capitol Hill Historic District.

Thank you for considering our comments.

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<sup>1</sup> See *Roof Decks and Roof Additions Design Considerations and Submission Requirements*, cited in staff report, 302 South Carolina Avenue, SE, HPA 18-675.

