

**Testimony of the
Historic Preservation Committee of the Capitol Hill Restoration Society
before the DC Historic Preservation Review Board
647 G Street, SE HPA 23-096
December 15, 2022**

My name is Beth Purcell and I am testifying on behalf of the Capitol Hill Restoration Society's Historic Preservation Committee. We reviewed the plans posted on HPO's website on November 21, 2022, and met with the applicant's team on zoom on December 14, 2022.

This two-story angled bay brick rowhouse with basement was designed by C.E. Webb and built by Hutchinson & Harbin for owner Faust A. Ambrosi in 1908. This is a contributing building.

The applicant plans to expand the building by excavating a new level below existing basement, renovate the interior, and add a small rear extension. The single family house would be converted into five units:

Basement/cellar: unit 1, wheelchair accessible; First floor: units 2 and 3;
Second floor: unit 4; Third floor: unit 5.

There are three issues with this case: 1. substantial demolition, 2. an oversize areaway, and 3. damage to historic fabric.

Substantial demolition is planned. The walls, windows, and stairs on the front elevation would remain, and the party wall. The roof, side wall and rear wall would be demolished. We agree with the staff's recommendation to reduce the extent of interior structural demolition and to retain and reinforce the existing floor framing systems.

Board's guidance on basement entrances and windows. We agree with the staff's assessment the project fails to comply with the Board's guidance on basement entrances and windows. The proposed areaway would extend six feet into the front yard (the public parking), double the 36 inches recommended.

Damage to historic fabric. The oversize areaway raises another problem with the project – its nontraditional and dark interior space. The existing basement is a typical Capitol Hill English basement, with two front windows providing natural light with the aid of narrow light well. The grade on site slopes down towards the rear of property partially exposing the existing basement. The new

lowest level will be rather dark, with street-side bedroom windows at the bottom of a downward-extended lightwell and rear rooms open to new excavated areaway/patio. From the back right axonometric view the basement unit appears to open into a sort of trench. Traditional Capitol Hill basement apartments have good natural lighting and are accessible by stairs, not ladders. Very few people would want to live in this non-traditional dark space, and for that reason the Board should not approve this proposed basement unit. Historic fabric must be protected, whether or not damage, such as the proposed basement apartment, would be readily visible from public space.

We believe that at this time the project is not compatible with the Capitol Hill Historic District and we agree with the staff that the project should return to the board.

Thank you for considering our comments.