



GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
Dupont Circle Advisory Neighborhood Commission 2B

September 30, 2014

Gretchen Pfahler, Chair
Historic Preservation Review Board
Office of Planning
1100 4th Street, SW, Suite E650
Washington, DC 20024
historic.preservation@dc.gov

RE: HPRB Resolution on 1772 Church St - St. Thomas Church

Dear Chairwoman Pfahler,

At its special meeting on September 29, 2014, the Dupont Circle Advisory Neighborhood Commission (“ANC 2B” or “Commission”) considered the above-referenced matter. With 7 of 8 Commissioners in attendance, a quorum at a duly-noticed public meeting, the Commission approved the following resolution by a vote of 6-1-0.

Whereas, the project team for 1772 Church Street NW has submitted design plans to the Historic Preservation Review Board (HPRB) for review of concept and massing of a renovated church structure and a new residential structure;

Whereas, the development of the two components is to occur concurrently and was applied for together, ANC 2B has reviewed the religious and residential components separately, as required by Federal law;

Whereas, the project team submitted drawings in July that ANC 2B reviewed and commented on;

Whereas, in July, ANC 2B agreed with the Dupont Circle Conservancy in noting concern that “the residential massing presents an incongruous transition on Church Street with the rest of the block.” ANC 2B suggested that the designers reduce bulk adjacent to the townhouses on Church Street with a more gradual increase in height from the east to the west;

Whereas, ANC 2B recognizes that the project team has made changes to the design that address concerns raised in the July ANC resolution, including reducing bulk at the far east side of the project;

Whereas, the community greatly appreciated the gift of the park that the community has enjoyed for decades;

Whereas, there remain significant concerns from neighbors regarding total massing, setbacks on all sides of the lot, as well as elimination of park and green space;

Whereas, there is general consensus that the totality of the project is large in its scale and massing, however there is not consensus on whether that will have positive or negative impacts on the neighborhood, or both. Additionally, there are architectural approaches that can be introduced to reduce the perceived massing and height, particularly from the ground;

Whereas, ANC 2B supports a community involvement process, working with the office of Councilmember Jack Evans, that will bring together neighbors, the applicant, the developer and the ANC to proactively address potential negative impacts on quality-of-life issues such as light and air quality, traffic congestion and safety, parking, loading and unloading, and others;

Whereas, ANC 2B recognizes that these quality-of-life concerns are generally addressed through a zoning process that the ANC will hear in the near future, but that these concerns are also directly correlated to the massing of the structure that is the subject of HPRB review, especially the residential component that will house perhaps one hundred new residents, and also to the concept design of the structure that is subject to HPRB review, especially whether the design incorporates parking/loading/unloading elements sufficient to accommodate the proposed uses of the building, and that therefore these concerns are appropriate to address to HPRB and should be taken into account by HPRB; and

Whereas, the ANC in prior church construction or renovation projects has had concerns that the HPRB does not take into account applicable constitutional and federal law – including the Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA) and the Religious Land Use and Institutionalized Person Act (RLUIPA) – and that the HPRB has not recognized that these federal laws supersede the HPRB’s own regulations and impose further limitations the HPRB’s authority.

Therefore, be it RESOLVED that ANC 2B does not object to the concept and massing of the religious component of the project and strongly urges the HPRB to take seriously its duty to follow applicable federal law – including RFRA and RLUIPA – by not imposing undue burdens on the use of this property for religious purposes; and

Be it further RESOLVED that ANC 2B would only support the residential component massing and concept under the following conditions:

- At the proposed residential building adjacent to the church, a significant setback is established beginning at the fourth or fifth floor as it faces Church Street;

- The project team begins active participation in a committee made up of neighbors, the church and the ANC to proactively address potential zoning and quality-of-life related matters prior to submitting an application for any zoning relief;
- The project team hires a professional arborist and submits plans to the ANC and HPRB that include methods to protect and preserve existing trees to the extent possible and, where not possible, to replace them;
- The plans are altered so that the setback of the ground floor on Church Street from the sidewalk is consistent from the residential to religious components (maximizing that setback where possible and adding as much landscaped green space as possible); and
- As recommended in the HPO staff report, the project team reexamine some of the earlier design elements as they relate to expression of the project at the pedestrian level and determine ways to improve the design's relation to the street and overall unity of the two components.

Commissioners Noah Smith (noah.smith@dupontcircleanc.net), Mike Feldstein (mike.feldstein@dupontcircleanc.net) and Stephanie Maltz (stephanie.maltz@dupontcircleanc.net) are the Commission's representatives in this matter.

ON BEHALF OF THE COMMISSION.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Noah Smith". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Noah Smith
Chairman

cc:steve.calcott@dc.gov; kim.elliott@dc.gov