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Deny Special Exception and Variances for 1665 Harvard St NW

Resolved, that ANC1D advises the Board of Zoning Adjustment to deny the Special Exceptions and variances requested for 1665 Harvard St NW, Case 19629.

Why: This Commission appreciates the substantial reduction in size made by the applicant, responding to concerns expressed last fall. The height of the structure has been reduced from over 20 feet to 15 feet, and what was a garage and an alley apartment is now only a garage with overhead storage.

This Commission has no objection to an alley garage, *per se*. Under ordinary circumstances, this Commission would not object to the BZA allowing variances to permit a garage. This is, however, no ordinary circumstance. This situation is unique because the location of this tiny lot is directly behind the dwelling at 1701 Harvard Street, which is home to a different owner than the owner of the alley lot in question.

The current application is similar to that filed in 2008 for this location, a garage which was to be 16 feet tall. In October 2008, this ANC advised, by unanimous vote, against permitting variances for that proposal, arguing as follows:

“Any building constructed on this tiny lot would face the rear of the home on lot 826, 1701 Harvard Street. With a roof height of 16 feet above the back-yard ground level, only 17 feet from the existing row house at 1701 Harvard, this construction will clearly have an adverse effect on the light and air of that dwelling.

“Though some neighbors favor this construction, the residents of 1701 Harvard are very unhappy at the prospect of a garage being built on that location. They have a valid complaint, and ANC1D advises that this application for a zoning variance be denied.”

The current application only slightly modifies these dimensions. The proposed structure is 15 feet tall and would be 19 feet from the back of the 1701 dwelling. These reductions are not sufficient to overcome the clear fact that this



construction would “box in” the backyard of 1701 Harvard and would obstruct all view from the top-floor windows of that home. The fence visible in the photograph is six feet tall, so the proposed garage would tower nine feet over it and would match the overall height of the 1701 Harvard residence.

On a communitywide level, another detriment to the public good would be how the proposed garage would obstruct pedestrian sightlines between a public walkway alongside the 1701 Harvard lot (taking the place of a nonexistent block of 17th Street) to a public alleyway. Currently, the lack of any structure in this lot allows pedestrians a clear view of oncoming alley traffic from the west (see Figure 1). The construction of a garage on this lot without considerable side setback will greatly reduce the ability of pedestrians to see oncoming traffic and thus increases the chance of cars hitting pedestrians (see Figure 2).

In order to permit a variance, the BZA must find that “granting the request would not cause substantial detriment to the public good. This Commission believes that, due to the height of the proposed garage, on this very awkwardly situated lot, its construction would be a “detriment to the public good” of the adjacent neighboring properties (and especially the neighbors at 1701 Harvard).

FIGURE 1: Current unobstructed sightlines

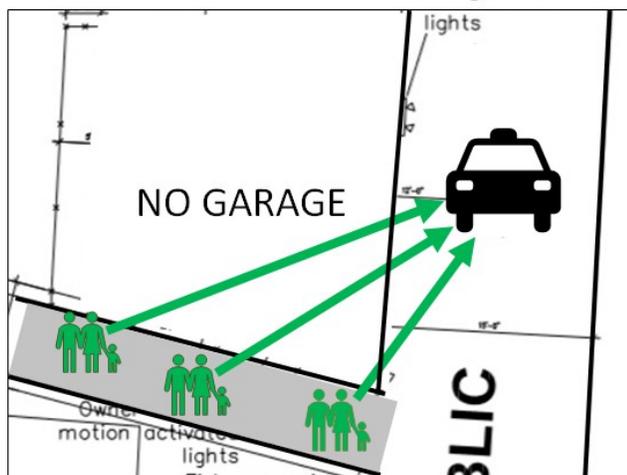
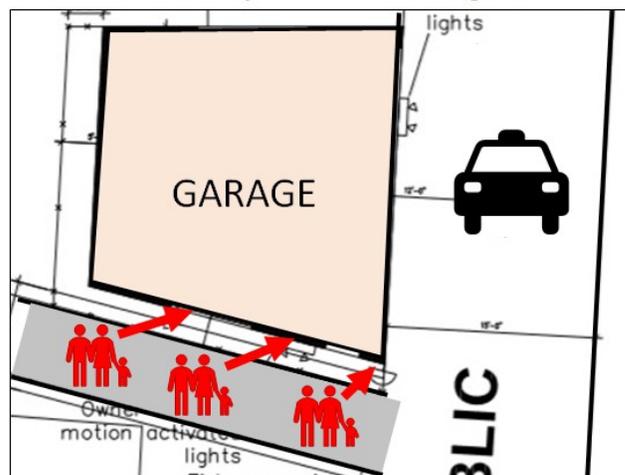


FIGURE 2: Proposed obstructed sightlines



Furthermore, the BZA must also find that “granting the request... would not be inconsistent with the general intent and purpose of the Zoning Regulations”. The Zoning Regulations for Mount Pleasant’s RF-1 district are explicitly intended to “Control the location of building bulk in relation to adjacent lots and streets, by regulating rear setbacks, side setbacks, and the relationship of buildings to street lot lines” to avoid proximate obstructions as will occur if the BZA approves this application. Thus, the approval of this application would be inconsistent with that objective of controlling building bulk in relation to neighboring lots.

Resolution passed, 5 to 0 vote, at the legally noticed, public meeting of ANCID on February 20, 2018, with a quorum present. Voting “yes”: Commissioners Karaffa, Romero-Latin, Stewart, Karrer, McKay. A quorum for this commission is three; five commissioners were present.