

Testimony of Stephen A. Hansen on 2341 Ashmead Place (HPA 16-055)
D.C. Historic Preservation Review Board
July 28, 2016

Chair Pfaehler and members of the Board:

My name is Stephen Hansen. I am principal of Preservation Matters, LLC and a 14-year home owner and resident of Ashmead Place. I am sorry that I could not be here today and am grateful that my testimony could be read by a neighbor.

I remain concerned about the proposed treatment of the historic front porch and entrance way of 2341 Ashmead Place in order to create a building code-compliant entrance to a new basement unit.

Today, the city's historic districts are constantly under pressure as developers eye their larger homes for conversion into multiple unit buildings— a transformation that often seeks to expand these building as well. While their rears can often support a reasonable amount of expansion, this process only reinforces the primacy of facades and front entranceways in preserving a building's historic character and integrity.

The five Mediterranean-Revival style houses at 2341 to 2349 Ashmead Place were built with rusticated stone porches, each capped with a classical stone balustrade. A shallow stair run and narrow opening underneath each porch led to a utilitarian cellar. 2341 Ashmead Place is the best preserved porch and entranceway of these five houses, and is the last one that still maintains its stone balustrade. While in need of some repair, the porch remains structurally sound and could easily be restored.

A staff report, originally submitted for a postponed June hearing, describes a series of alterations to the front that includes expanding the width of the front basement steps by approximately 2' and extending them further towards the street in order to meet code to access an excavated basement level. They also involve removing original parts of the building by cutting into a support pier under the porch, and shaving off part of the masonry corner of the bay.

The staff report itself stated that these measures were incompatible with the Board's own guidelines for basements entrances, which state that "Original or character defining entrance stairs, porches and projecting bays should be preserved and not be altered to accommodate basement entrances." The recommendation of that staff report was that the front access to the basement be redesigned to be consistent with the Board's Guidelines—*it was not*. And, the project returns to Board today with another staff report that continues to question the applicant's proposed treatment of the front.

These houses are already structurally challenged. For example, the façade wall of the neighboring house immediately to the right of this project has pulled inches away from the house towards the street. The front bay of another of these five houses was shored up with tie rods and anchor plates to keep it from pulling away from the house any further. The proposed measures

for the entryway at 2341 Ashmead, along with excavating under the front wall of the house to lower the cellar, may cause additional structural issues for itself and the neighboring houses.

If there were a clear and workable solution that allowed for the conversion of the basement that followed the Board's Guidelines, HPO staff would have certainly worked it out with the applicant by now. But, the project moving forward as proposed requires a compromise of the Guidelines. So today, I ask that the Board give careful consideration to the proposed treatment of the front porch and entrance way and its impact on the building's historic and structural integrity.

Thank you.