



NRCA, P.O. Box 3242, Alexandria, VA 22302

February 3, 2020

SENT VIA EMAIL

ATTN: Mr. Nathan Macek, Chair
City of Alexandria Planning Commission
301 King Street
Alexandria, VA 22314

RE: Agenda Item 10, Special Use Permit #2019-00094—3202 Old Dominion Boulevard

Dear Mr. Macek:

I am writing on behalf of the North Ridge Citizens Association (NRCA) pursuant to Special Use Permit #2019-00094 (February 4, 2020, Docket Item #10). While not entirely opposed to the replacement of the existing structure at 3202 Old Dominion Boulevard, which is a substandard lot, we remain seriously apprehensive about the height, bulk and compatibility of the proposed structure considering the immediate neighborhood.

Concerns were first raised during our November 11, 2019 monthly meeting, when the applicant and the architect presented an initial building design. These concerns were reiterated by the Planning Commission staff in its December 24th report, resulting in the application's withdrawal. At staff's suggestion, the building design was altered to the extent that when resubmitted in January 2020, staff reversed its position and supported granting the SUP - in effect, agreeing that the proposed replacement structure would be "compatible with the existing neighborhood character in terms of bulk, height, and design," as required by Zoning Ordinance 12-901(C).

While we commend the efforts of P&Z staff in working with the applicant to resolve initial concerns, several neighbors adjacent to – or in close proximity of – 3202 Old Dominion Boulevard remain concerned about the building plan.

Our NRCA reviewers could not agree that the requirements of the ordinance have been met with the latest revisions. Issues of continued concern include:

- Based on the data provided in the January 25th staff report (Figure 11, page 13), the bulk of the proposed replacement house at 6,362 GSF is more than twice (230 percent) the existing home, and nearly twice (197 percent) the average of homes on this block of Old Dominion. In fact, it is now 717 GSF larger than that of the original proposal.
- The height of the proposed structure, although four feet lower than originally proposed, will still be the highest on the block – nearly 30 percent taller than the average home. The



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proposed house would tower over neighboring 3204 Old Dominion and would be taller than the house at 3200 Old Dominion, which is on higher ground. Given that this is a substandard lot, we must recognize that bulk and height impacts are all the more severe. While lowering the structure's height may impede the construction of nine or ten-foot ceilings, this is an issue that does not serve as a legitimate basis for approval of a building plan that is inconsistent with the character of neighboring properties.

- We remain concerned that existing trees, particularly a large magnolia and a large cedar, will either be removed or destroyed and that the shrub and canopy coverage standards (pages 17-19 of the City's 2019 *Landscape Guidelines*) will not be met.

In summary, NRCA urges the Planning Commission to return this application to staff for further design modification. The goal should be to lessen the impact of a replacement structure on neighboring residents. This request stems not only from our apprehensions about this building's immediate effects on the neighborhood, but also the long-term precedent that would be set if houses on substandard lots that deviate so far from the norm can still be found—to quote the ordinance—“compatible with the existing neighborhood character in terms of bulk, height, and design.”

Sincerely,

Kay Stimson

Kay Stimson
NRCA President