

July 20, 2016

Re: Renaissance Property Group Proposal for 308 N. Blair St

To Whom It May Concern:

The steering committee composed of neighbors of the block have considered the proposal by Renaissance Property Group for the demolition of an existing 3-bedroom house at 308 N. Blair St., and the construction of an eight-unit, 14-bedroom apartment building. The following summary represents the opinions and feedback of the neighbors who were able to provide input.

### **The Neighborhood & Site**

The block and site in which the development is proposed is a highly unique area in the James Madison Park neighborhood. This particular block is a fairly intact block, with a mix of owner-occupied single family homes and two- and three-story houses that have been converted to as few as two- and as many as five-unit multifamily properties.

The Mansion Hill-James Madison Park Small Cap TIF Program has targeted this block and nearby neighborhood, providing incentive for owner-occupants to purchase and rehabilitate existing rental housing. This plan fits in with the Downtown Plan of the neighborhood, to increase availability of housing for families. Other contributions to the block include the addition of a home, now containing three units, that was relocated to the lot next to the proposed development, and is an excellent example of keeping with the rhythm and flow of the block.

### **Meetings & Developer Feedback**

The development team originally presented the proposal to the public on 6/14/16 and on 6/27/16 at a steering committee meeting. Throughout the few weeks in which neighbors were able to provide feedback, some minor design changes were made by the development team as well as two additional porches on the back side, a slightly larger front entry porch and some outdoor space to meet usable open space requirements that were previously unmet in the proposal presented on 6/27/16.

The development team declined to consider suggestions from neighborhood members for potentially reducing the number of units in the proposed development, to reduce overcrowding on the block caused by replacing a three-bedroom home with a 14-bedroom apartment complex.

### **Supplemental Materials & Findings**

Excerpts from the Downtown Plan for James Madison Park

- About new developments:
  - Recommendation 102: *“Require that new development provide an ample on-site open space and play areas for use by young children, and do not waive usable open space requirements in the James Madison Park District.”*
  - Recommendation 103: *“Encourage family-supportive housing design in new multi-family developments, including more modern, larger units (2-3 bedrooms) and true usable on-site open space.”*

- Recommendation 105: *“Allow infill and redevelopment along Hancock, Franklin and Blair Streets generally compatible in scale and design with the predominantly “house like” neighborhood character.”*

## **Overall Neighborhood Feedback**

Many of the neighbors on the block were interested in providing feedback and may also be attending the plan commission meeting to share individual feedback. There are some neighbors who adamantly oppose the demolition of the current home, noting concern over the neglect of the house that may have led to the consideration of demolition. There is concern that this may be part of a trend in demolition of single-family residences becoming commonplace in the downtown area, thus reducing housing options available for families. While one property owner on the block does support the redevelopment as proposed, the majority of neighbors have voiced significant concern over density, structure and parking.

### **1. Expressed concerns about the density and structure**

As aforementioned, this block is a unique mix of owner-occupied homes and rental properties, most two- to three-story homes. A significant portion of the subject lot occupies the Risser garden, which somewhat skews the representation of the percentage of building-to-lot coverage when compared to existing lots on the block.

The proposed building would be roughly 2,754 square feet larger than any current home on the block, a significant change to the neighborhood rhythm and flow. Some comments from neighbors in the immediate vicinity of the development have included include, “too big” and “has no relationship with the lake.” The proposed development continues to feel more like an apartment building than the “house-like” feel encouraged in the downtown plan.

There are several neighbors on the block who agree that the current house on the site is in such a state of neglect and disrepair that it does warrant a redevelopment. However, this same majority feel the proposal of eight apartment units at the site is too many to keep with the rhythm of the block.

City Row, just across the street, has 83 units -- and there are several new and proposed large housing developments within a few blocks of this site. A continuous trend toward demolition of single family homes contrasts with the City’s downtown plan to entice more families to reside in the neighborhood. It’s likely that if this home were listed on the market, it would be a prime option for an owner occupant to repair and occupy the existing home using the Mansion Hill-James Madison Small Cap TIF program.

### **2. Expressed concerns over available, affordable parking**

A particular concern for both tenant occupants and owner occupants on the block has been the absence of available parking for the high density of units (bringing up to 14 new resident car owners onto the block at one time) and concern about the impact on the neighborhood on overnight street parking, which is already very crowded. In addition, the few private parking spaces now available for rent on the block would become more desirable and thus potentially cause a significant increase in parking costs for current residents – or make finding an

affordable parking space in the area difficult or impossible.

The neighborhood encourages the plan commission to consider all neighborhood feedback as well as additional individual feedback for those who choose to speak at the plan commission meeting. This summary was compiled by Alex Einsman, a member of a steering committee of neighbors occupying the block of the proposed development.