



May 25, 2021

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

RE: 1637 17th Street NW (HPRB #21-318)

Dear Chair Heath:

Dupont Circle Citizens Association (“DCCA”) is submitting these comments regarding the above-referenced matter, which is currently scheduled for consideration by the Historic Preservation Review Board at its public meeting on May 27, 2021. DCCA concurs with the HPO staff report on this matter, and does not support the concept plans to enclose an existing sidewalk cafe facing R Street NW.

The Dupont Italian Kitchen is a popular restaurant on 17th Street, and we understand their desire to increase the size of the kitchen and recover lost seating by enclosing the patio. We also appreciate the modifications of the original design in response to HPO staff comments and review by ANC 2B by lowering the roof height to maintain visibility of the decorative frieze, slightly reducing the enclosure’s footprint, and other measures taken to reduce the visual impact of the enclosure.

However, open view sheds are a defining element of the L’Enfant Plan upon which all planning in the City of Washington is supposed to be based. This consideration is especially applicable on this corner, which is not only public space but also part of the L’Enfant Plan defined streets. It took acts of Congress in the 1870’s to allow bays and other projections into the public space. Further actions in the 1960’s allowed sidewalk cafes, and more recently, temporary structures such as awnings and other structures removable within 24 hours. Although technically the proposed project would be removable, in appearance it will read as a permanent part of the building.

The blocks of 17th Street between P and R Streets NW, and some adjacent buildings on the side streets, are replete with sidewalk cafes, which offer an almost continuous vista of vibrant street life. Allowing this ‘temporary’ enclosure will likely encourage others to seek them, or to request the construction of opaque walls between sidewalk cafes, severely altering the historic nature of the neighborhood.

Respectfully submitted,

Susan Volman
President, DCCA
president@dupont-circle.org