

Jan. 23, 2019

538 S. Fifth Avenue
Ann Arbor, MI 48104

Zoning Board of Appeals
Ann Arbor, MI 48104

Re: ZBA18-030; 532 South Fifth Avenue

To Members of the Board:

I am the owner of the property right next door to 532 S. 5th Avenue. I have both intermittently occupied and rented apartments on my property for over thirty years. I am only one of four owners on our block who occupy their properties, while renting out to others.

I write to object to the request to alter the nonconforming structure at the 532 property. I am certain that, if the plan is implemented, I will suffer significant negative impacts on my use and enjoyment of my own property, the value of my property, and the profitability and desirability of my property as a rental property.

First, I want to correct an inaccuracy. The property has been described in records and, at a former hearing, as having been built in 1901. That is definitely an inaccurate estimate, which the assessing department may have made. Instead, the structure, in its present size and configuration appears in an 1880 bird's-eye drawn map of Ann Arbor. From the Library of Congress website, I magnified the area of the map in which the house appears, and attached it to my letter. As you can see from the magnified drawing, the house, in its present size, was sitting next to my house, at least as early as 1880. My home was built before 1865; the applicant's home may have been constructed before 1880.

This at-issue property rests on a unique block in the near downtown, Germantown area. Almost all of the present homes on the block were constructed in the 19th century. Only one was constructed in 1901 – the year Queen Victoria died. None of the other blocks in Germantown are free from 20th century replacement homes or post-1960, commercial rental structures. Our little block of Victorian homes is not only quaint in appearance, but the containment of development, reined in by the requirements of R4C zoning, has resulted in an unusually quiet, restful environment in which to live. This is unusual in a location, like this, close to both downtown and the campus. That is why adult and elderly professionals chose to live here alongside students, young workers, and graduate and professional school students. I do not want our unique and enjoyable neighborhood to be destroyed or diminished by this ill-conceived and bloated proposal before the board today.

I am not opposed to development or improvements on our block. I am just opposed to this particular plan. I do not necessarily object to my neighbor altering the structure on his lot, I just ask that he take his neighbors into consideration, and submit a plan more consistent with the other structures on the block, in terms of bedrooms/unit, and in terms of available parking. I am

delighted that the applicant intends to preserve the front of the structure, but wish he would submit an alternative plan that also preserves the fabric of the neighborhood, as well as his neighbor's property values and enjoyment of their property.

My objections and concerns regarding the request follow:

1. Misrepresentation in the Application

The applicant falsely states that both intended units will have four bedrooms. Yet, it is obvious, from the plans submitted, that the applicant intends to put at least six bedrooms in the back unit, with at least two bedrooms drawn into plans for the basement. The staff, in its report, failed to notice this inconsistency between the alleged plan, as stated in writing, and that rendered in the drawings. The proposal drawings indicate a total of ten proposed bedrooms – not eight proposed bedrooms. Hence, the proposed alteration would more than triple the current number of bedrooms.

2. Possible Basement Bedrooms Might be Added to the Front Proposed Structure

Given the apparent misrepresentation about the planned bedroom number, I am concerned that, in the area marked for “storage” in the new added basement, additional bedrooms might be added in the future, perhaps to the front apartment, or that, once the property is given an approval consistent with R4C zoning, a third apartment might be created in the basement, raising the number of bedrooms or units even more.

3. The Number of Proposed Bedrooms per Unit is Inconsistent with the Neighborhood Which Will Create Overcrowding and Magnify Noise

I took the time to review the online property data on the city assessment site. My review of the available data indicates that the number of bedrooms on this block, per house, ranges from 3-6, with the average number of bedrooms being 4.2/house. None of the homes, which have not been subdivided into apartments, has more than 3 bedrooms. None of the homes has any individual apartments with more two bedrooms. This application is proposing, on its face, to make an apartment with triple the number of bedrooms compared to the largest apartments presently on this block.

We all know that apartments with four to six bedrooms, rented by the bedroom, are going to attract younger students, with multiple subleases, and less stability in occupancy lease term. City study groups of R4C have noted that apartments with four to six tenants magnify the noise, garbage, and littering in the neighborhood. They also have noted that there is no enforcement, in these multi-bedroom apartments, of the limit of six occupants per apartment. Hence, we can expect that far more than 10 students are going to occupy the proposed structure, at any time. This proposed structure is going to attract and engender an “animal house” atmosphere which our neighborhood has thus far been spared.

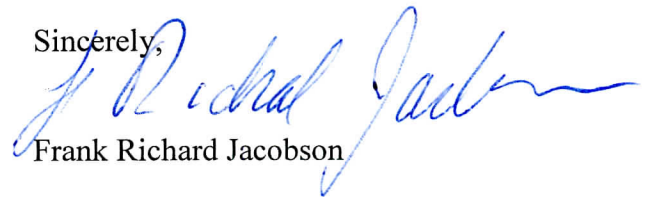
Due to the unusually quiet nature of our block, I have been able to attract long-term tenants in professional school, and even visiting professors or scholars, who stayed for several years, and love this location. My ability to attract and retain tenants, long term, will be diminished by this proposal.

4. The Parking is Inadequate for the Number of Occupants and Will Create Safety Hazards and Parking Problems.

Four parking spots are woefully inadequate for the proposed 10-bedroom structure. The occupants will have friends and family who will visit and stay overnight. The city has restricted on-street parking on this block, due to the steep hill and low visibility, for those exiting driveways. Even now, we have trouble with students parking in the no-parking spots on the street. The proposed structure will greatly increase this problem, and make exiting driveways more hazardous.

In conclusion, I might favor an approval of a future plan, if the applicant would create 3-4 apartments with lower numbers of bedrooms, and adequate parking for the residents.

Sincerely,



Frank Richard Jacobson

MAP

Panoramic view of the city of Ann Arbor, Washtenaw Co., Michigan 1880.

« About this Item

