

June 1, 2013

TO: Chair and Members of Planning Commission

CC: City Council, OHA BAR

From: Andrew H. Macdonald, 217 N. Columbus St., Alexandria, VA  
22314

RE: Cromley Row, Docket Item #4 A&B, Subdivision Plat # 2013—0006,  
Development Site Plan #2012-0024

Chair and Members of the Planning Commission:

As a resident of N. Columbus Street and the Old and Historic Alexandria District, I strongly urge you to reject this proposal in its current form. The BAR staff and Board Members (only four voted) of the Old and Historic Alexandria District spent little effort working with the community to address their valid concerns. Because I'm out of town, I'm submitting my comments in writing.

The residents most affected by this project believe the BAR's recent approval of the project should not be approved because the proposal is not compatible with the historic character of the neighborhood and District and because many community objections (and recommendations) were not addressed. **The Certificate of Appropriateness is not appropriate at all.**

The proposed project is not compatible with the adjacent neighborhood and its historic residential character. A significant number of residents of the neighborhood have therefore appealed the BAR's recent approval (only 4 members were present) to the City Council. The project is clearly NOT compatible with the historic character of the neighborhood, nor its preexisting residential mass and scale and appearance.

The residents most affected by this project - which includes everyone who enjoys and pays to live in the historic district - were not consulted adequately. Their concerns were essentially ignored despite their efforts to participate in the process and offer reasonable alternative design changes.

**The proposed subdivision changes proposed exacerbate the negative impact of this project on the surrounding neighborhood and historic character of the district.**

Although the community was most concerned about the mass, scale and actual height of the proposed buildings – and oversized windows – as viewed through the lens of the historic district, I think that the proposed subdivision changes should be examined carefully from a similar residential perspective. If indeed these structures are to be residential in nature – and not just a clever attempt to design structures that will have a commercial use – they should hew much more closely and sensitively to the residential character of the neighborhood. The scale and mass of new buildings on Washington Street and the monolithic and sterile architecture that is filling the area along Route 1 should not be the foundation for this subdivision request.

Mr. Cromley and the BAR staff will argue that this subdivision plan design is compatible with the current residential neighborhoods that are adjacent to it and that it's an "eclectic" yet pleasing addition to the street scape. In fact, I would argue that the subdivision plan (reduction in setbacks, no yards, etc.) before you simply aggravates the negative non-conforming aspects of mass and scale, and aesthetics, that make this project, as currently designed, so wrong for this street and its historic district.

The mass and scale of the project, and its overall design characteristics, will be influenced negatively by the subdivision request before you. I think that the subdivision requests should be denied pending a review of the Certificate of Appropriateness by the City Council. However, I think that you can and should address (make changes to) those aspects of the plan that affect its residential appropriateness for the neighborhood in question.

**In summary: The community is not opposed to the redevelopment of this site (which once was the site of older structures) but they strongly object to the process to date, which has been neither consultative nor constructive.**

I urge you to reject this proposal today based on its lack of residential compatibility with the neighborhood. Properly scaled residential townhouses with real yards and a mass and scale that sensitively incorporate the town's priceless historic roots will receive broad neighborhood support I believe.

Andrew Macdonald  
217 N. Columbus St