

# DEL RAY CITIZENS ASSOCIATION

[WWW.delraycitizens.org](http://WWW.delraycitizens.org)

P.O. Box 2233, Alexandria, VA 22301

June 9, 2016

Planning Commission Members and Karl W. Moritz, Director  
Department of Planning and Zoning  
City of Alexandria  
City Hall, Room 2100  
Alexandria, VA 22314

## **RE: Proposed subdivision of 113. East Custis Ave. (#2016-003)**

On May 10, 2016, the Del Ray Citizens' Association (DRCA) Land Use Committee (LUC) reviewed the proposed subdivision of 113 East Custis Avenue into two lots (SUP #2016-003). The application was discussed during an open public meeting that included Catherine Puskar, the attorney for the applicant.

During the meeting Ms. Puskar, gave a presentation in which she made clear the intent of the new owners to demolish the existing home and create two new homes. After a discussion by the LUC, there was a unanimous vote by the committee to oppose the subdivision, as it will result in the loss of a contributing historic structure to the Town of Potomac Historic District ("District").

The District was created 25 years under the leadership of the Del Ray Citizens Association and with significant financial and staff support from the City of Alexandria. The Small Area Plan for Potomac West, which includes the entirety of the District, memorializes the City's stated intention at the time to protect and enhance the District. It reads:

"The Town of Potomac and Rosemont Historic Districts have unique histories, resulting in neighborhoods with a unique and defined character, buildings and homes that are of historic value. The City has recognized the value of preserving their history.

"The City supports and encourages the protection and enhancement of the historic value of the Town of Potomac and Rosemont Historic District."

The home at 113 E Custis, known as the Cunningham House, is a relatively rare Tudor Revival structure that was plagued by the previous owners. Attached are a drawing of the building and a history.

The City should not be complicit in the destruction of a building that contributes to any historic district and we urge you to vote no.

If the subdivision moves forward, LUC asks that a side-by-side single-width driveway with shared curb cut and tandem parking be provided. This will minimize the impact to on-street parking. Further, the LUC insists the Del Ray Residential Pattern Book be used as a resource for the design of the new structures so they are compatible with the architecture of the neighborhood.

At its June 8 membership meeting, the Del Ray Citizens' Association voted to uphold the Land Use Committee's recommendations.

Sincerely,

s/Danielle Fidler

Kristine Hesse, Co-Chair  
Danielle Fidler, Co-Chair  
Del Ray Citizens Association  
Land Use Committee

Rod Kuckro  
President  
Del Ray Citizens Association

#### Attachments

Cc: Catharine Puskar, Attorney for the  
applicant  
Sarah Brandt Vorel, Staff Reviewer

## **The Cunningham House**

Lots 580 and 581 of the Del Ray subdivision were purchased as an investment, as was common at the time, by Cecilia Shea in December 1897. She sold it, still vacant, to Thomas and Lillian Cunningham in July 1936. They wasted little time and contracted with EL Varney for the construction of the current house that same year.

Thomas, then 19, had married 21-year-old Lillian Andrews in 1917 and they quickly grew a family with four sons, William (born 1918), James (1920), Charles (1923) and Robert (1926). They moved to Alexandria from the Richmond area around 1932 with Thomas working initially as a car salesman. He got a job as a letter carrier with the post office around 1940 and worked his way up quickly to become the postmaster for Mount Vernon in 1953.

They raised all four sons in the house on Custis until they got married and moved away one after another. The curtain finally came down in 1975. Thomas was diagnosed with bowel cancer, followed by complications from peritonitis. He passed away in July 1975 at age. With that Lillian left the house for Fairfax County, herself passing away of a stroke six months later. The children, William (and Frances), James (and Diane), Charles (and Patricia) and Robert (and Jean) sold the house in May 1976 to Robert Hatch and his wife Suzanne Laurencell. That ended no less than forty years of the Cunninghams at 113 E Custis. At that point the lot was 100 feet wide, the Cunninghams having purchased 25 feet on the west side in 1940 and 25 on the east side in 1962.

Hatch and Laurencell sold the house to in 1989, who sold it to the Kirkpatricks in 1996. The Kirkpatricks lived there for twenty years.

The Cunningham house is a key contributor to the National Historic District. Not only is it a wooden Tudor revival style, which the nomination documentation itself refers to as “not too common” in the district, but it is also unchanged from its original 1936 appearance from the public spaces. It was included in the Town of Potomac National Historic District as a contributing structure in 1991 and was examined again in 2000, found to be fully intact and awarded a Historical Association plaque.

The house is dominated by a tall brick chimney in the center of the front-facing gable, not unheard-of for that style, but which is rare in the historic district. A tall, narrow window on each side of the chimney provides light into the living room from the northern side. The front door is on the side of the front-facing gable off the porch, which is built in the ell of front face, featuring slender wooden columns and wooden balustrade.

