



District of Columbia Government  
Advisory Neighborhood Commission 6A  
Box 75115  
Washington, DC 20013



November 14, 2005

Lisa Burcham  
Associate Director  
Historic Preservation Division  
801 North Capitol Street NE, Suite 3000  
Washington, DC 20002

Re: HPA #05-522 (138 12<sup>th</sup> Street NE)

Dear Ms. Burcham:

On November 10, 2005, at our regularly scheduled monthly public meeting, our Commission unanimously voted to send a letter to the Historic Preservation Review Board to assist in the review of 138 12<sup>th</sup> Street NE. As you are aware, this building was purchased by the AppleTree Institute for Education Innovation, a nonprofit organization with a charter from the DC Public Charter School Board. AppleTree has submitted plans for a preschool use and expansion of this property. The ANC opposes the proposed design submitted for our review because of incompatibility with the surrounding neighborhood.

At our latest ANC meeting, AppleTree indicated that they would be requesting a postponement of their scheduled November hearing date by submitting substantially revised plans which would require additional staff review. ANC 6A supports this postponement in order to provide time for community review of the revised plans. Although the revisions were described to the ANC, no actual plans were provided. As a result, ANC 6A is providing the following comments and general discussion on the plans for the "AppleTree Flagship" dated September 22, 2005.

First, the ANC recommends that HPRB delay hearing any proposal by AppleTree until the Zoning Administrator in the Department of Consumer and Regulatory Affairs makes a written determination of whether the proposal is a matter of right or requires zoning relief. In brief, the ANC has asked DCRA for a determination of whether AppleTree's use qualifies as a public school, a child development center, or private school. The outcome of this determination will have a substantial impact on the permissible size, scale, massing and lot occupancy of the expanded building. Depending on this determination, additional hearings by the Board of Zoning Adjustment may be necessary. As a result, it would be advisable for HPRB to wait for the zoning questions to be resolved before reviewing a project that may require substantial revisions for zoning reasons.

Second, the ANC opposes the design that has been submitted because of incompatibility with the surrounding neighborhood. According to AppleTree's submissions, the existing 4,320 sq. ft. building has two-stories plus basement with dimensions of 36' x 40' on a lot that is 36' x 117.5'. This corresponds to 34% lot occupancy. The plans call for an aggressive expansion to dimensions of 36' x 94' with an additional third floor of 800 sq. ft. set back 32' from the front of the building, a patio and a rooftop outdoor play area. This corresponds to 80% lot occupancy and 10,952 interior sq. ft. plus over 1,000 sq. ft. of usable roof space. The expansion would leave room for 3 parking spaces on the alley, but no yard or other greenspace in the rear of the building.

One major concern is the scale and bulk of the expanded building with respect to neighboring historic residential properties. This property is located mid-block on the west side of 12<sup>th</sup> Street NE in the first block north of Lincoln Park. The immediate vicinity is composed almost entirely of modest residential rowhouses and lacks significant non-residential architecture. The existing building, while having a slightly less residential appearance, fits within the context of the residential neighborhood precisely because it does not overwhelm the surrounding properties with an excessive footprint on the lot. Any significant expansion beyond the existing building envelope would

overshadow the existing contributing structure as well as the surrounding contributing residential structures. This would occur partly through projection toward the rear of the lot, but also because the addition would be two lots (36 feet) wide.

Another concern is the effect of the rear addition on the pattern of open rear yard/garden space behind the residential properties along the block. The addition proposed by AppleTree would create a mid-block obstruction to the current landscape of open backyards and garden areas immediately behind the rowhouses. This effect would be particularly pronounced for the neighboring properties, which would be presented with two-story blank walls topped with a rooftop recreation area. However, a double-wide addition would also affect the flow of the entire block. As a result of its overall mass and depth on the double lot, the proposed structure would destroy the open views along the rear of the 12<sup>th</sup> Street homes and would present itself to its 11<sup>th</sup> Street neighbors as a hulking institutional presence.

Another concern is the visibility of various elements of AppleTree's proposed structure from the street and alley. Based on the materials provided by AppleTree, it is unclear to what extent the third story addition, required mechanical systems, or any playground equipment in the rooftop recreation area will be visible from 12<sup>th</sup> Street NE, Constitution Avenue NE, Walter Houp Court NE, or the wide rear alley. The potential visibility of these elements would detract from the strong residential character of the surrounding area. Given the lack of details, it seems that there is a possibility that these elements could end up being more obtrusive as the proposal moves through other code reviews. In particular, the presence of children on the upper floor and roof may require additional fencing, fire escapes, or other elements that are not shown in current drawings.

In conclusion, should your review of the AppleTree proposal move forward at this time, we urge you to reject it. As described in this letter, in the staff report, in comments from the Capitol Hill Restoration Society, and in letters from residents, this project has the potential to reshape a historic residential neighborhood in radical and unwelcome ways.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. If you have any questions or need further information, please contact Commissioner Rice at 202-544-3734 or rice6A03@verizon.net.

On behalf of the Commission,



Joseph Fengler  
Chair, Advisory Neighborhood Commission 6A

cc: Councilmember Sharon Ambrose  
Emily Paulus, Historic Preservation Office