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**ANC 3/4G Testimony Before the
Committee of the Whole
Performance Oversight Hearing for the
Department of Consumer and Regulatory Affairs
February 27, 2019**

Chairperson Mendelson and members of the Council. I am Randy Speck, Chair of ANC 3/4G (Chevy Chase), and I am testifying on behalf of our Commission, which authorized this testimony at its February 25, 2019 meeting by a vote of 6 to 0 (a quorum being 4).

The Department of Consumer and Regulatory Affairs (DCRA) has not taken clear and decisive action to remedy the nuisance and safety hazard created by the negligence and incompetence of the owner/developer of the properties at 5301 and 5303 Connecticut Avenue, NW, the former site of Wardman duplex houses that date from the 1920s. Despite repeated complaints, over the past two years, DCRA has permitted the property to become derelict, hazardous, and a potential haven for vagrants with unknown tendencies. There are undoubtedly many similar instances across the District of failure to enforce statutes and codes. Our residents have a right to expect better from DCRA.

DCRA issued a building permit at 5301 Connecticut on February 20, 2016, for a “new addition and renovation to an existing single family row dwelling” and to convert it into an eight-unit multifamily dwelling. On March 4, 2016, however, DCRA posted a stop work order when the total demolition was only partially complete. Nearby residents contacted the developer in March 2016, with their concerns about how the design of the proposed condominiums would fit in with the neighborhood. By August 2016, the building at 5301 Connecticut had been completely demolished without a demolition permit and without following any lead abatement procedures.

In August 2016, a nearby resident complained to Commissioner Chris Fromboluti (who represents this Single Member District) about the unsightly mess in the side and rear yard of 5301 Connecticut. The stench from the portable toilet placed in the yard and untouched for many weeks was obnoxious, the hedge was overgrown, the yard was piled with decaying tree branches and discarded materials, and a jerry-rigged black plastic enclosure was unsightly.

The same developer subsequently purchased the adjacent building at 5303 Connecticut, partially demolished it, and then abandoned it in November 2017. In February 2018, a DCRA inspector advised neighbors that he was boarding up the front door and that the owner would be required to board up all the windows that it had removed and to prevent access to the building. The inspector said that there were stop work orders on both buildings.

By that time, 5301 Connecticut had become a virtual dump, including an abandoned truck with Virginia registration (which was only recently removed). There

were none of the required permit postings and, until the last few months, no dumpster for trash. The DCRA inspector merely advised a neighbor to email the Mayor.

The building at 5303 Connecticut continues to be a blight and a hazard. Indigent people have stayed in the building and some have repeatedly exposed themselves to passing students. The building and the site are not secure and cannot be left in their present state. The attachment to this testimony includes photos of this dilapidated site from various times over the past two years.

In January 2019, Commissioner Chris Fromboluti contacted Clarence Whitescarver, DCRA's Acting Chief Building Officer, and gave him the entire history of this location. He acknowledged that photos of the site showed obvious violations. Even after multiple emails and phone calls by residents and Commissioner Fromboluti over the past two years, DCRA still has taken no action. These buildings pose a continuing safety risk to the neighborhood, which includes a child care center one house away. The Council should insist that DCRA enforce the law to abate this situation with immediate corrective actions.