



July 17, 2023

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Mr. Brian Hanlon, Acting Director
Department of Buildings
1100 4th Street, SW
Washington, DC 20024

VIA: Electronic Mail

RE: 519 6TH Street SE Vacancy Determination

Dear Acting Director Hanlon:

At a regularly scheduled, properly noticed, meeting on July 11, 2023, with a quorum present, Advisory Neighborhood Commission (ANC) 6B voted 7-0-0 to send this letter to you.

We write to you today to seek your help in the case of the vacant of 519 6th Street SE and to urge you to review the vacant building policies and processes of the DOB. Some background: Mr. Michael Filippello, has been the co-owner of 517 6th ST. SE, Washington, D.C. 20003 since May of 1999. The adjoining property, 519 6th St. SE, Washington, D.C. 20003, has been a nuisance property since then, and a vacant property for a large percentage of that time.

Mr. Filippello's main objective is to reinstate the vacant status retroactively and enforce the penalties for the entire time it can be determined the building was vacant. We think this is a fair course of action given the circumstances and the nuisance he has had to endure for 17 years. We hope you can look at this case in a new light given the totality of the evidence.

As noted above, Mr. Filippello has been dealing with this nuisance property since 1999, but issues began in earnest in 2006. While the case seems to be trending towards a solution that will remedy the problem (the sale of the house in question) the route to get here was tortuous and highlighted weaknesses in the DOB vacant housing process that we feel need to be addressed. Mr. Filippello also presents compelling evidence that the house is, and has been, vacant, if not for the entire time, then for very long stretches. He has documented this case in a detailed manner in other communications that have been shared with ANC Commissioners and DCRA. A sampling of the issues the Mr. Filippello had to deal with due to the building being vacant:

- Repeated engagement with DOB (and the former DCRA) to get inspectors out to the property to determine vacancy.
- A homeless person squatting in the garage.
- Neglect of the rear yard during periods when the building was not occupied. Large receptacles catching rainwater created a haven for rats and which provided

breeding grounds for mosquitos. While DCRA/DOB did clean this up once or twice, it kept recurring every few years.

- A broken internal water pipe that ran for days and caused significant internal damage to 519 and sweating on the party wall between the properties.

While not directly related to the building being vacant, he also experienced the following issues that point to the neighbor being a less than ideal actor:

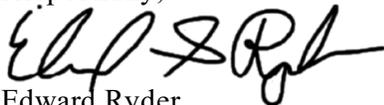
- Illegal construction of an 8' tall masonry wall on public property in the front of the property. The wall still exists, and the issue has not been resolved.
- Illegal construction in the back of the property. The illegal construction still exists, and the issue is not resolved.
- Raccoons living in the upper floors.
- The dumping of human waste in a bucket in the front yard.

The current situation at the house demonstrates that it is clearly unlivable and not occupied. It was noted on a recent visit by MPD and a court appointed trustee for the house that a “hoarding situation with mold and vermin” is present and that “MPD will not enter without a HAZMAT team”. It is also clear that the owner of the property went to great lengths to game the system even insisting at one point that the fact that there was no running water at the property was negated by the fact that they had installed a portable water tank system for their water needs. The reasoning, while perhaps possible, strains credulity. There were numerous examples of this type of reasoning being presented and accepted by DOB.

Mr. Filippello is, understandably, extremely frustrated. He had to file a FOIA request and spend hours going over the timeline of complaints and rebutting the thin evidence provided by the absentee owner. This is not something a resident should have to do to get relief on this sort of issue from their government. Staffing switches in the DOB General Counsel’s office exacerbated an already frustrating situation.

We urge you to take a long, hard look at the vacant properties process, writ large. As a new Acting Director of a young agency, this is a perfect time to critically reevaluate processes that might have ossified or broken down over time. In particular, this case seems to indicate that it is far too easy for a bad actor to game the system and hard to get DOB to recognize the bad behavior as such. In order to achieve the goals of minimizing vacant housing stock and putting it to the best and highest use housing DC’s residents, the DOB vacant housing processes must be robust and function efficiently. That has clearly not happened in this case and we are hopeful that some action on your part can prevent it from happening in the future.

Respectfully,



Edward Ryder
Chair, ANC 6B

Cc:

Charles Allen, Ward 6 Councilmember
Commissioner David Sobelsohn (6B03)
Michael Filippello