

Kate Chess  
129 Flora Street, Providence, RI

October 7, 2024

Dear Zoning Board of Review members,

I own the single-family house located at 129 Flora Street and live there with my family, directly adjacent to 135 Flora Street. I have three objections to the proposed parking lot:

1. **EMPTY LOTS ATTRACT CRIME.** The character of the neighborhood and our proximity to the highway means that an unattended lot will attract crime. The connection between vacant urban land and crime has been shown by well-established sociological and criminological academic studies.<sup>1</sup> This July, a shooting homicide occurred at night in the parking lot of the Walmart on Silver Spring here in the Charles neighborhood.<sup>2</sup> I have seen firsthand what happens in empty lots on my street. There is already a parking lot directly across the street from the property under consideration, at the Chatham Village apartment complex, and in our four years in the neighborhood, my family has witnessed countless instances of dirt-bike riding, drug transactions, larceny, and trash dumping. We also see people at night using parked cars as places to play loud music, use drugs, or have sex. The presence of cameras and on-site management have not been able to stop these activities from taking place, nor have police patrols. Yet, because the Chatham Village lot belongs to an apartment complex, it is utilized 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and it is highly exposed to view. The proposed lot, attached to a community/center/church a block away, will be less used and more secluded and will therefore attract even more crime, create an unsafe environment for neighbors, and devalue neighboring property.
2. **THE APPLICANT HAS DEMONSTRATED A DISREGARD FOR CITY RULES.** Zoning regulations exist to protect property values, conserve the environment, improve health and wellness and protect residents' rights. With that in mind, the applicants' failure to follow regulations comes into sharp focus. Mr. Cabrera and DMJ Services purchased the 135 Flora Street property on July 3, 2024. Less than a week later, on July 9, 2024, they began knocking over trees next to my house with a small bulldozer. Despite apparent access to industrial construction equipment, they were not using appropriate equipment for tree removal and they did not have a lawful permit to conduct such operations. In the months since, they have continued to develop the land inconsistently and without regard to any discernible schedule. The applicants have already built a small asphalt parking area (see attached photos) at 135 Flora Street. Concerningly, in the months since Mr. Cabrera bought the property, trash has piled up on the easement and the grass has repeatedly been left to grow long through a lack of maintenance. A fellow resident of Flora Street, Enio Garcia,

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<sup>1</sup> See, e.g., Charles C. Branas, Eugenia South, Michelle C. Kondo, Bernadette C. Hohl, Philippe Bougois, Douglas J. Wiebe, and John M. MacDonald, *Citywide cluster randomized trial to restore blighted vacant land and its effects on violence, crime, and fear*, 115(12), Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences (PNAS), 2946 (2018), available at: <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1718503115>.

<sup>2</sup> *Man shot to death in Walmart store parking lot in Providence*, WJAR July 27, 2024, available at: <https://turnto10.com/news/local/providence-police-investigate-overnight-homicide-silver-spring-street-saturday-july-27-2024>

picks up trash and mows their easement to keep the neighborhood looking decent. We should not have to rely on Mr. Garcia's generosity and sense of civic duty to protect our neighborhood from the applicants' neglect and disregard for regulations.

DMJ Services' actions, so far, have not been lawful or professional. As they continue to build, how can neighbors feel confident that they will order a land survey and stay on their side of the property line? Will they use proper equipment and safety protocols when they take down the remaining trees and remove the massive boulders on the land? Will they maintain the property and keep it clear of trash? How will they secure the property as work goes on? Will they follow city code with regard to landscaping and fencing? Is there an enforcement method to ensure they will keep their promises?

3. **EXTREME PROXIMITY OF PROPOSED ENTRANCE TO NEIGHBORING HOUSE RAISES SAFETY CONCERNS.** The proposed entrance of the parking lot is right next to my house. In fact, it is next to the room where my child sleeps. Informally, at a neighborhood meeting, we asked the applicant if they would move the entrance to another location, and they said yes. I am disappointed to see that this is not the case in their proposal. Why must the entrance be on the extreme far end of their property, the side most distant from the community center/church on Northrup Avenue that the lot serves, right next to the only house that adjoins the lot? Why can't it be elsewhere?

A large portion of the 135 Flora Street lot used to be wooded. The trees provided shade and a habitat for birds and animals in a part of the city that doesn't have a lot of green space. 100% of the land there was permeable soil. The preparation for the new parking lot, which the applicants have already unlawfully undertaken, has destroyed this small pocket of nature. Providence is in a housing crisis; I would have been happy to see those trees taken down so a family could live there. But a parking lot does not improve quality of life in the same way; it degrades it. The Charles neighborhood is residential, and many children live here, including my preschool-aged child. If the work goes forward, there is every possibility that the illicit activities already happening across the street at Chatham Village will continue and expand into the parking lot at 135 Flora Street. I cannot overstate my concern that if the applicants' permit is granted, my family will be exposed, at even greater frequency and closer proximity than ever before, to these activities. Even setting aside my concern that noise level inherent from the constant passage of motor vehicles will disrupt my daughter's sleep, I fear the exposure to these activities will actively endanger and harm her and the other children who live nearby.

In the interest of preserving property values, conserving the environment, promoting health and wellness, and most importantly, protecting the residents' safety and well-being, I respectfully ask the Board to deny Mr. Cabrera and DMJ Services' application for a special use permit.

Sincerely,

Kate Chess

PHOTOS (attached):

A. tree removal, July 9, 2024

B and C. Heavy equipment and piles of materials, October 7, 2024

D. Partially-finished parking lot, October 7, 2024

E., F., and G. Garbage in the lot and on the easement, October 7, 2024















