

PRESS RELEASE

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DC Government Commission Approves Turning Alley Over to “Trump Loyalists”

WASHINGTON, DC May 14, 2024--The New York Times has called the Conservative Partnership Institute “a breeding ground for the next generation of Trump loyalists.” Arizona recently indicted Mark Meadows, CPI’s senior partner, for trying to subvert Joe Biden’s 2020 victory in that state.

CPI owns substantial property on Capitol Hill, across the street from the Library of Congress. CPI calls that block “Patriot Row.” The Heritage Foundation owns one of the buildings.

CPI’s buildings surround a courtyard, which CPI also owns. Many years ago, to provide access to two garages abutting the courtyard, the DC government declared a right-of-way easement over a tiny sliver of the courtyard, a strip officially designated as an “alley.” What had been garages are now empty, unused as garages for decades. No one has used the narrow dead-end alley for transportation for just as long.

In January 2023, CPI applied for DC to abandon its right of way to the alley. CPI wants to renovate the courtyard and hold events there.

Under DC law, “The Mayor may close all or part of any street and alley which is determined by the Council to be unnecessary for street or alley purposes” (DC Official Code § 9-202.01).

Each of Washington, DC’s eight wards is divided into neighborhoods. Under the DC Code, each neighborhood elects an Advisory Neighborhood Commission (ANC). The ANC part of DC government advocates for its neighborhood before other branches of government.

On May 14, 2024, in exchange for a series of promised community benefits, the ANC that represents that part of Capitol Hill voted to support CPI’s alley closing.

“I deplore CPI’s politics,” said the ANC’s chair, Edward Ryder. “Their connections with January 6 insurrectionists are a major concern. They worry us.”

“But we live under a Constitution,” Ryder pointed out. “Whatever CPI supports, we must follow *our* principles, not theirs. We take an oath to support the Constitution. That means not discriminating based on political beliefs.”

Nevertheless, the ANC only agreed to support CPI's retaking the alley after extracting a dozen promised community benefits. Among others, these promises include:

1. A \$100,000 contribution to the Capitol Hill Community Foundation, a local nonpartisan nonideological grants-making fund that, according to its website, supports "activities, projects, and groups that enrich the lives of residents and celebrate the history and beauty of our community."
2. Public access to the courtyard, currently off-limits to the public.
3. Public use of meeting space in CPI's buildings.
4. Indoor trash storage, a limit on truck access and on hours CPI can use its courtyard, and the installation of security cameras, a privacy fence, extra lighting, and a safety mirror.

Closing the alley depends on the DC Council's determination that the alley's "unnecessary for street or alley purposes." But under the ANC agreement, many CPI promises don't depend on the Council's ultimate decision. So, for example, whatever the Council does, the agreement obligates CPI to give the Capitol Hill Community Foundation \$25,000 (of an eventual \$100,000), to limit truck access and the hours CPI can use its courtyard, and to provide many of the agreement's other protections for nearby neighbors.

Even if the alley never gets closed, for eight years the ANC would retain access to meeting space in CPI's buildings.

In its vote, the ANC defied the views of some Capitol Hill residents. One resident complained that CPI "opposes abortion rights, same-sex marriage and LGBT rights, denies climate change, [and] wants to move the country backwards on race relations." Other residents simply opposed making any agreement with a group as tainted as CPI.

Replied ANC commissioner David Sobelsohn, a former constitutional-law professor: "I find CPI's politics deeply offensive. But we have an obligation to treat this application regardless of its source. The first amendment binds us. It rules out guilt by association."

Added ANC Commissioner Frank D'Andrea, who chaired a key ANC committee that approved the alley closing: "The worst possible outcome would be for us to oppose this alley closing, then for the Council and Mayor to endorse it. The neighborhood would then get nothing." Besides, he added, "Aside from excluding the public from the sliver of an alley, CPI can already do whatever it wants in its courtyard. Their only limits would come from our agreement."