

June 8, 2024

Akemi Chayama and Jay B Etherington  
19 Hawthorne Street  
Belmont, MA

Office of Planning & Building  
Homer Municipal Building  
19 Moore Street  
Belmont, MA

Dear Members of the Planning and Zoning Board,

We are writing today in strong opposition to the application of Yuzhu Jiang for One Special Permit and Design and Site Plan Approval (under sections 1.5.4A and 6D-2 of the By-Law) to construct a two-family dwelling at 25 Hawthorne Street. We are very concerned that the proposed plan will negatively impact the Hawthorne Street neighborhood and the community of Belmont. We respectfully ask you, the members of the Planning and Zoning Board, to vote against these permits and approval requests.

We have lived in our small old house at 19 Hawthorne Street, for over sixteen years now. It is one of the smallest structures on the street. We call Belmont our home and love our neighborhood for having trees always around us (we love the fact that Belmont has been designated a USA Tree City), allowing us to enjoy and appreciate the constantly changing seasonal beauties that nature brings to us.

Hawthorne Street is not a large main street. It is a quiet smaller street. The proposed design is an enormous structure of 5,830 square feet (or 5,994 SF = 2,884 SF/Unit A + 3,009 SF/Unit B). It is the shape of a boxy warehouse-like dwelling. It is oversized for our street.

To see the whole picture requires a closer look at it.

[https://www.belmont-ma.gov/sites/g/files/vyhlf12826/f/uploads/24-08\\_application\\_with\\_plans.pdf](https://www.belmont-ma.gov/sites/g/files/vyhlf12826/f/uploads/24-08_application_with_plans.pdf)

For example, the proposed design has livable, functional basement spaces (2,247 square feet) and two 2-car garages (952 square feet). The structure fully encloses the garages in the middle of it. Therefore, in reality, it is **a structure size of 6,946 square feet standing above the ground**. It is **a total of 8,241 square feet for a functionally livable area** if the basement (2 large family rooms, 2 full bathrooms, a golf simulator space, and a foyer) is added. If all of them are added, it is **9,193 square feet**. This structure has **8 full bathrooms and 2 half bathrooms**. This structure's **½ floor (so-called LEVEL ATTIC) has a total of 1,111 square feet of functionally livable space with two full bathrooms**.

Our house is 1,692 square feet, built in the late 1800s. It is a Mansard Victorian house. It carries the history and culture of Belmont. We live in this house, but we also know that we are caretakers of this old house. Someday, we will pass this house to the next owners to enjoy, add their marks on it, and make it their own. Someday, we will pass this house to another family to treasure its heritage, create their memories, and be part of this house's stories in Belmont.

Now, please imagine a huge boxed-shaped structure of 6,782 square feet standing to tower over a very small house of 1,692 square feet. Our house will be in a cast of shadow. It will affect our health and safety. Especially, since it is exposed to noise, wind, summer heat, and lost privacy as the trees that protected and comforted us were cut down abruptly without any warning or communication.

We agree with many of the things being said in the opposition letters that our neighbors have submitted. We are also concerned about our future social and health conditions, our property's market value, our property conditions (for example, the root system of the cut-down trees), and more. We appreciate our concerned neighbors deciding to raise their voices.

[2024 Cases | belmontma \(belmont-ma.gov\)](#)

In our letter, rather than repeating the concerns that already have been said, we use the rest of this letter to share some of our recent experiences in the hope that the members of the Planning and Zoning Board would see another reason to take a closer look at the current proposal and vote against it.

On the morning of January 4th this year, we found multiple huge trucks taking over the street in front of our house and blocking our driveway. Not knowing what was happening, we asked one of the workers by those trucks. They told us that we would need to let them know at least 30 minutes ahead of time if we wanted to drive in and out of our own driveway. All these unexpected commotions and surprises forced us to change our morning plans at the very last minute. While trying to adjust our day, it eventually became too late for us to get to our work or to our appointment. We did not know that it required us to make a 30-minute advance request to access the street until that morning.

The workers told us that they were working to cut down some trees at 25 Hawthorne Street. We believe that the new owner Yuzhu Jiang was onsite and saw us being confused but did not come to talk to us. We were shocked and confused by the noises and disorders, but what made us more shocked and confused was to find out that they decided to cut down not just one, but all seven or eight beautiful trees by the end of the day. Two of those trees have been partly living on our property. We had taken care of them and loved them very much for over 16 years (See Table 1).

**Table 1: Photos of the Trees that had lived on both 25 Hawthorne Street and 19 Hawthorne Street**

**Blue lines** – an approximate property line between 25 Hawthorne Street and 19 Hawthorne Street.

**Yellow outlines** – approximate outlines of the trees that had resided in both 25 Hawthorne Street and 19 Hawthorne Street.

	<p><b>Aerial view from the direct above</b>          19 Hawthorne Street – the right side of the blue line          25 Hawthorne Street – the left side of the blue line</p>
	<p><b>The fence line going off the property line (the blue line) to protect the tree (yellow)</b>          19 Hawthorne Street – the right side of the blue line          25 Hawthorne Street – the left side of the blue line</p>
	<p><b>The tree (yellow) in the front yard</b>          25 Hawthorne Street – the right side of the blue line          19 Hawthorne Street – the left side of the blue line</p>

As the day progressed, some of the cut trees were lifted up by a crane to cross over our property, traveling in the air above our roof. It did not make us feel comfortable and safe. One of those cut trees hanging in the air came too close to one of our neighbor's houses, and it had to make the workers suspend their work for a while. A lot of shouting and yelling was happening. We would like to ask the members of the Planning and Zoning Board if it was normal in Belmont for anyone to proceed with a project of this scale without notifying the people living on the same street (See Table 2).

**Table 2: Photos from January 4<sup>th</sup>, 2024**



While we were concerned if the new owner Yuzhu Jiang was planning to take the current single-family house down and build a huge structure, we asked Yuzhu Jiang's family member about it one evening. He told us that they were not planning to take the current house down or build a huge structure. He said that they were just planning to update, renovate, and expand it a little. If he was telling the truth, we would like to know why their proposed building design dated in January, the same time when we spoke.

The new owner Yuzhu Jiang wrote that they "fell in love with the charming town of Belmont" in the application as well as the letters that they have dropped off in our mailbox. We would like to ask them if they truly love and care about the town of Belmont, how come they do not care about their neighborhood and their neighbors of Belmont? Being in love with Belmont means caring for and respecting its neighborhood and neighbors instead of only caring for and

focusing on one's own self-gain. A community usually becomes stronger and richer when people care about each other. We would like to ask the new owner Yuzhu Jiang to become more forthcoming instead of selectively only sharing the information that they want us to hear (why they did not tell us anything about the tree removal plan?). We would like to ask the new owner Yuzhu Jiang to reconsider their plan.

We, both Akemi and Jay, are shy and private people, living in Belmont. Akemi has been an educator at a non-profit organization serving local children and their caregivers for more than 20 years. Jay is an IT support tech who is a New Englander at his core. We are usually living quietly and tend to “mind our own”, but we decided to speak up because we are uncomfortable seeing what has been happening.

**With that, we respectfully and humbly ask you the members of the Planning and Zoning Board to protect the interests of us and our neighbors, review their process steps so far, critically examine and analyze the designed plan, and vote against these permits and approval requests.**

With kind regards,  
Akemi & Jay