

Testimony Calling for the Rejection of the Appeal of the Dupont East Civic Association (Case 20453)

July 28, 2021

My name is Francisca Cromwell, I have been a resident of Washington, D.C. over the past 10 years, and more locally, a resident of the Dupont neighborhood for the past two. In true D.C. - fashion, I work for an international development non-profit that seeks to improve local governance practices and economic opportunities for people around the world and domestically. I am also involved in a DC-based housing justice initiative called Just Homes, which seeks to address the severe lack of affordable housing available to low, and extremely low income residents and to end homelessness in the city. With these details in mind, I find it deeply concerning that a wealthy country like the United States, and a city with a budget of **16.9 Billion**, has the capability and the resources to allocate funds to affordable housing programming and eliminate homelessness, and **chooses** not to do so. Shelter is a basic human need, and should be considered a human right. I am submitting my testimony to speak specifically to the topic at hand, regarding the building of a 150-unit apartment complex on Masonic Temple grounds, which is being contested by the Dupont East Civic Action Association (DECAA), citing zoning violations.

If someone in this neighborhood needs to say it on the record, I will. Citing zoning concerns seems to be a pretext for circumventing increasing property taxes that may result from the development, and “changing the character of the neighborhood”. This rhetoric is exclusionary and damaging, especially for communities of color, who are disproportionately impacted by DC’s lack of affordable housing, and the housing shortage in general. As a Dupont resident who lives less than one block away from the site of the proposed development, I would like to say “Yes In My Backyard”, which is one small step toward mitigating the housing shortage in our city.

Our city is in a housing crisis. Lack of housing is driving up prices for everyone and leaving the vulnerable among us unprotected and unhoused. According to the 2021 point-in-time count, (conducted by The Community Partnership in January 2021) on any given night there are 5,111 homeless persons in the District of Columbia:

- 681 unsheltered persons (i.e. persons “on the street”);
- 3,352 persons in Emergency Shelters; and
- 1,078 persons in Transitional Housing facilities.

In addition, in the midst of the pandemic, [housing placements were suspended](#) and [homeless shelters](#) had to provide 24-hour service to meet increased demand. In this crisis, we must seize every opportunity to build spaces to live and alleviate the crushing shortage that is hurting all of us. Building this housing development in Dupont would add to available housing in the city, therefore relieving some of the pressure that inflates housing prices. I am in favor of this

development because I care about the housing crisis in the city and want to ensure there is a home for every resident.

This housing development will meet a critical need in our city for housing, and should include at least a portion devoted to **Inclusionary Zoning (IZ)** for low income residents. Under D.C. law, 7% of the square footage of this new development would need to be preserved for affordable housing. I propose that we increase this percentage of space dedicated to affordable housing so that vulnerable families and individuals would have more options in where they can live. Since the proposed project has 150 new units, we would realistically expect that 10-20% of floor area would be devoted to affordable units for people making no more than 60% of the area median income.

As a local Dupont Circle inhabitant, I would like to reiterate my desire to see this apartment complex built in my backyard, for the good of the city and its residents. Let's put this five year fight to rest, and move on so we can address building more affordable housing opportunities into the budget for the upcoming fiscal year.