

**GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA  
ADVISORY NEIGHBORHOOD COMMISSION 8D**



**Commissioner Dionne Yvette Brown**

**Testimony to Board of Zoning Adjustment  
BZA Application No. 21229 of WC PROPERTIES, LLC  
February 26, 2024**

I greet you as the Advisory Neighborhood Commissioner for Single Member District 8D01 at the northernmost portion of the Bellevue neighborhood in Far SW Washington and as the Acting Chairperson of ANC 8D. We, the Commission, have not met this calendar year due to the inability to establish a quorum as a result of multiple vacancies. ANC 8D therefore does not have a formal position on WC Properties' BZA Application No. 21229 regarding proposed construction on the lots at 62-62 Forrester Street SW. Frederick Nelson, a resident of SMD 8D07 where the project is located, has been certified to fill that seat and is scheduled to be sworn in on Monday, March 3.

My individual opinion, in consultation with neighbors and the Commissioner-designee, is that the requested variance makes sense. The lots in question are undeveloped and unsightly. A new apartment building would be aesthetically pleasing and add value. It would also provide affordable quality housing to prospective residents. Being surrounded by apartment buildings on each side makes another one a logical choice for that particular location. It also makes business sense to pursue an option that leverages economies of scale to compensate for the inordinate site preparation expenses.

Of more concern are the policies forcing this alternative. Bellevue is saturated with affordable housing, social services, and the like. It is very unlivable according to the planning indices and is one of the few neighborhoods in the District of Columbia that has become less so over the past two decades while the rest of the city thrives. Martin Luther King said: The slums are the handiwork of a vicious system of the white society; Negroes live in them but do not make them any more than a prisoner makes a prison.

So I look at this proposal and say here we go again. The Department of Housing and Community Development's covenant restrictions limiting the proposed apartment building to at least 50% of units set at 120% MFI rates is not the fault of the developer. They are simply playing the hand they were dealt. But those who pass and uphold the rules of record look at us with a straight face and pretend this is just the free market at work when it is all by policy and design.

A case in point is Trinity Plaza in my SMD. The Far SE-SW Community Development Corporation (CDC) worked closely with the community to ensure their plans were compatible with our preferences. Duplex condominiums were supposed to occupy the upper levels of their building with retail on the first level and commercial office space on the second. Banks, as well as city leaders, were not confident in the ability of the condos to sell or the CDCs ability to attract businesses. Thus, financing languished. The final

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product consisted of rental apartments totally occupying the upper levels with a drug store and day care center on the ground floor. All initial tenants were housing voucher recipients.

Bellevue residents were promised one-to-one replacement for the retail strip demolished to make way for a new mid-rise apartment building at 4001 South Capitol Street SW. We were promised: 100% commercial office space on the corner of South Capitol and Atlantic, ground level retail with apartments in the main building, and a small footprint grocer with residential units above the building at 4137. What we got was another building filled with low-income apartments and with a corner store on the ground level due to the common challenge other developers faced accessing capital. The first two buildings were merged into what stands now, with no commercial office space on the site at all. DC's Human Services office that previously occupied a building at the corner of S. Capitol & Atlantic Streets was supposed to be moved to 4137 temporarily and return to the ground floor of the eventual space where Good Food Market opened. The city invested heavily to build out the space for Human Service's permanent occupancy before construction began on the building at 4001 S. Capitol Street.

We have a dearth of moderately-sized market rate homes to attract residents necessary to make our demographics attractive to businesses and none are in the pipeline. Danbury Station was supposed to be anchored by detached single family houses with townhomes interspersed down the block. City leaders listened to the empty barrels that made the most noise and supported a high concentration of townhouses that are too small for the way families live today. It took 15 years for the original owners to build equity to make moving up possible. Not one of those empty barrels lived in Bellevue or bought one of those houses. Bellevue's housing stock needs diversity and improvement.

The saying "The road to hell is paved with good intentions" rings true in our fair city. Living has not gotten any better in the 24 years I have resided in Bellevue. Affordable housing sounds noble, but produces adverse effects when concentrated into one side of the city without market rate housing and economic development in tandem.

Crime statistics have experienced an upswing in the past decade with a consequent decline in my neighborhood's quality of life and home values as the city concentrates low-income people and services catering to them East of the River. This reinforces systemic inequities. Those of us who took the risk to live, invest, and plant roots in the Bellevue neighborhood are being punished while western portions of the city flourish.

A shooting occurred in the unit block of Galveston Street SW around 9:30 this past Sunday morning as I walked my dog just a block away. A 14 year-old boy was murdered two blocks from my house just three Sundays prior in the middle of the afternoon. This becomes normalized when communities are othered as has been mine. I grew up in a Washington that was economically diverse where poor people were not marginalized and relegated to living in a limited range of options. What you are building here is a powder keg and I, personally, am not committed to sticking around to see how this experiment turns out.