

**Testimony in Support of the
Inclusionary Zoning Overlay District
as proposed by the
District of Columbia Office of Planning
Case Number: 04-33A
District of Columbia Zoning Commission
Hearing from Public Witnesses
Regarding Locations not in Historic Districts
October 5, 2006**

Members of the Commission, my name is Chris Zeilinger, and I am speaking before you today as President of Tifereth Israel Congregation, a synagogue located at 7701 Sixteenth Street N.W., in the Shepherd Park neighborhood of Washington, D C

Thank you for receiving testimony today from public witnesses with regard to the areas the Office of Planning has recommended to be included in the Mandatory Inclusionary Zoning category. My statement, which I will keep brief, is to support the Planning Office's proposal.

Our congregation has been located in the District of Columbia for our entire history, for which we are proud to be celebrating our 90th year, and we have been located in Shepherd Park since 1956. Through the years, we always have been committed to maintaining the diversity and vitality of our own neighborhood, and for all neighborhoods in the District. In the 1960s, we fought to preserve racial and economic diversity in the District's neighborhoods, and made a very conscious commitment to remain in the District of Columbia even as members of other congregations moved to the suburbs. Today, a third of our congregation's members live in the District, many of them in or adjacent to areas that would be designated for inclusionary zoning. We are excited by that prospect, and urge your adoption of the proposed areas for mandatory inclusionary zoning.

Housing affordability is an issue of concern to us. We are especially concerned about soaring housing costs in the District of Columbia, and the effects these costs are having on our own congregants, our neighbors, and our fellow citizens of D C. In the summer of 2005, I had the pleasure and the privilege of appearing before you in support of inclusionary zoning, and I applaud your actions following those public hearings. Since that time, we see that the Office of Planning has analyzed the methodologies for making inclusionary zoning a reality here in the District of Columbia. From all appearances, the proposed approach would facilitate a diversity of housing opportunities throughout the District, in every ward, and in almost every neighborhood, in ways that have minimal impact, that would allow the private sector to do what it does best in developing and producing our District's housing infrastructure, in ways that are sensitive to the transportation, schools and support systems used by low- and moderate-income households, and in ways that will preserve the character of the District's many diverse and vibrant neighborhoods.

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Our congregation has maintained its 90-year history as a quiet but dedicated institutional citizen of the District of Columbia. As I mentioned a moment ago, many of our members are themselves residents of the District; many more – myself included – would be District residents if attractive, affordable housing options had been in place. In addition to being grounded in the Shepherd Park neighborhood, we are active adjuncts in the elementary schools in several parts of the District, are part of the social services fabric in the areas near downtown, and are partners with community-based coalitions in Shaw, Brightwood, and other neighborhoods of the District. Everywhere we look, we see the need to protect the affordability of housing for the area's low- and moderate-income families. That is why we have supported the particular proposal that you are considering to implement the concept of mandatory inclusionary zoning.

Closer to our congregation's Shepherd Park home, we are pleased to see the Georgia Avenue corridor included in the proposed Inclusionary Zoning Overlay District. Our congregation, particularly our social action committee, long has been concerned about the untapped potential of this corridor to be a dynamic avenue of diverse housing options and locally appropriate commercial development. For as long as I can remember, we have been parts of various coalitions trying to promote the opportunities we see on this fabulous thoroughfare, and we have been partners with two community development corporations that have tried to do their part to bring housing and businesses to this avenue. These efforts have met with mixed results in the past, but we see a great new opportunity with the proposal for inclusionary zoning. Yes, we have noted the Office of Planning's estimates, and we know enough to realize that inclusionary zoning itself is not a panacea for all our housing affordability issues. However, when we look at other cities, and when we look at the opportunities here in the District of Columbia, we see that inclusionary zoning is just the kind of catalyst that many neighborhoods, such as that along Georgia Avenue, will find helpful to achieve their greater potential.

In 1956, when our congregation moved from Columbia Heights to its present home in Shepherd Park, Georgia Avenue was lined with a tremendous mixture of neighborhood-oriented retail enterprises, and surrounded by a multitude of single and multi-family housing in various price ranges. Some of you may remember it was the one-time heart of our area's Jewish community, along with our friends and neighbors of every ethnic background, and recent arrivals from all over the country and immigrants from other corners of the globe. It was a fun, satisfying and exciting place to live. Our desire is that the proposed approach to inclusionary zoning be adopted, so that this neighborhood can find its vibrancy anew.

Thank you for your consideration.