

"Testimony in Support of Amendments to the Inclusionary Zoning Requirements, Case Number 04-33B, July 26, 2007."

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Members of the Zoning Commission,

Thank you for this opportunity to testify on what is a very important subject to me. My name is Neha Bhatt, and I have lived in Washington, DC for over 10 years. I live in the Deanwood neighborhood in Ward 7, not far from Marvin Gaye Park at 5043 Blaine Street NE. I am here today because I support the proposed refinements to Inclusionary Zoning requirements regarding adding R-2 zones and specific standards for overlays.

After decades of flight, the city is seeing a wonderful resurgence of population and new vitality. It has been wonderful to see many of the positive changes. However, almost directly proportional to this upswing is the dwindling of good, affordable housing options. Even though affordable housing is such a hot topic, we are still way behind in meeting the demand. Meeting this growing demand will require a myriad of well-coordinated strategies, and inclusionary zoning is a key one.

Inclusionary zoning is so important because it makes sure that we develop in a manner that does not exclude whole segments of the population. It is a mechanism that allows us to continue to have mixed income neighborhoods – something I consider to be essential to the long-term health and character of a community. IZ is a tool that will help protect the diversity and longevity of our growing neighborhoods.

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IZ has been largely accepted as a good tool for providing affordable housing. But even today, affordable housing is still largely clustered. Experience, numerous case studies, and unending research have told us that this is a bad formula. We should be striving for mixed income neighborhoods along with a mixed income city. This means that we must include affordable housing in all parts of the city.

The proposed amendments currently under consideration by the Zoning Commission will help strengthen and complete the program so that affordable homes can be provided throughout the city and in as many neighborhoods as possible. By expanding the IZ requirements to R2 zones, we will be opening up even more areas of the city to middle and lower income families. I believe this is critically important if we are to walk the walk when it comes to building a truly inclusive city.

Given that we are so far behind in meeting affordable housing demand, I ask can we really afford to forgo any opportunities to provide more affordable units? A balanced community needs upper, middle and lower income households, and we need such balanced communities in all parts of the city whether they are zoned R-5 or R-2. And the fact is that middle and lower income families should have housing options that include town homes and single-family homes as well as any other income those from the upper income group. Why would we restrict affordability only to certain zones? There really isn't any good enough or fair reason to do that.

The proposed overlays are also important because they will help make the IZ strategy successful. It is important that the integrity of the neighborhood fabric be maintained and that the proposed adjustments seem to do that.

I want to thank the Commission for this opportunity to give input on what I see as a sensible and smart proposal to increase affordable housing and remove unfair restrictions on where it will be located