



ZONING COMMISSION
District of Columbia

CASE NO. 07-34

EXHIBIT NO. 10

Attachment No. 8

The Comprehensive Plan's Support for Row House Neighborhood Retention

Among the 2006 DC Comprehensive Plan's Guiding Principles for Creating Successful Neighborhoods are the following:

The residential character of neighborhoods must be maintained and improved. Many District neighborhoods possess social, economic, historic, and physical qualities that make them unique and desirable places in which to live. These qualities can lead to development and redevelopment pressures that threaten the very qualities that make the neighborhoods attractive. These pressures must be controlled to ensure that neighborhood character is preserved and enhanced. (218.1)¹

The District of Columbia contains many buildings and sites that contribute to its identity. Protecting historic resources through preservation laws and other programs is essential to retain the heritage that defines and distinguishes the city. Special efforts should be made to conserve row houses as the defining element of many District neighborhoods.... (218.4)²

The Comprehensive Plan's Land Use Element notes that the city's neighborhoods are among its most important resources and that in order to conserve single family neighborhoods city policies should be to:

Protect the character of row house neighborhoods by requiring the height and scale of structures to be consistent with the existing pattern, considering additional row house neighborhoods for "historic district" designation, and regulating the subdivision of row houses into multiple dwellings. Upward and outward extension of row houses, which compromise their design and scale, should be discouraged. (LU-2.1.7)³

Develop a new row house zoning district or divide the existing R-4 district into R-4-A and R-4-B to better recognize the unique nature of row house neighborhoods and conserve their architectural form (including height, mass, setbacks, and design) (Action LU-2.1-A)⁴

Further, the Comprehensive Plan notes under its Urban Design Element notes that the overarching urban design goal for the city should be to:

Enhance the beauty and livability of the city by protecting its historic design legacy, reinforcing the identity of its neighborhoods, harmoniously integrating new construction with existing buildings and the natural environment, and improving the vitality, appearance, and security of streets and public spaces. (Urban Design Goal 901)⁵

¹ 2006 DC Comprehensive Plan, p. 1-26.

² 2006 DC Comprehensive Plan, p. 1-26.

³ 2006 DC Comprehensive Plan, p. 1-55.

⁴ 2006 DC Comprehensive Plan, p. 1-56.

⁵ 2006 DC Comprehensive Plan, p. 1-132.

The 2006 Comprehensive Plan strongly acknowledges the importance of historic preservation in conserving the unique fabric of city neighborhoods and the fact that preservation needs are constantly changing. The neighborhood in this application includes four historic districts in the equally historic 1791 L'Enfant Plan itself. The Comprehensive Plan notes that the challenges of 50 years ago—freeways and urban renewal—have given way to a new set of equally challenging issues that include, among others, the “unprecedented pressure for new growth....” (1000.2)⁶ In addition to the fact that the neighborhood under review already has some level of protection by virtue of it being in historic districts, a less intense level of zoning will be work to ensure that the finite and non-renewable nature of its housing stock is protected for current residents and those who will assume future stewardship.(1000.5 and 1002.2)⁷

Current zoning for this and other Mid-City Area neighborhoods is clearly identified in the 2006 Comprehensive Plan as being out of sync with neighborhood needs which require greater protection than they have and are, therefore, important priorities for the Office of Planning:

Parts of the Mid-City Planning Area contain row houses, flats, and high-rise apartments on the same block. This pattern has been perpetuated in part by high-density zoning, a vestige of a time when the older housing in the area was thought to be obsolete and in need of replacement. (2002.2)⁸

The distinct and eclectic character that defines Mid-City neighborhoods should be protected as infill development takes place. (2007.2 (a))⁹

The row houses that define [these] neighborhoods...should be conserved. Some are even zoned for high-density apartments. A variety of problems have resulted, including demolition and replacement with much larger buildings, the subdivision of row houses into multi-unit flats and top story additions that disrupt architectural balance. Intact blocks of row houses should be zoned for row houses, and not for tall apartment buildings...and conservation districts should be considered to promote architectural character. (2007.2 (d))¹⁰

The Comprehensive Plan's Policy and Action statements reflect the Office of Planning's understanding of the need for zoning changes. For the neighborhood in this application, the Plan specifically notes the following:

Action MC-1.1-A: Rezoning of Row House Blocks: Selectively rezone well-established residential areas where the current zoning allows densities that are well beyond the existing development pattern. The emphasis should be on row house neighborhoods that are presently zoned R-5-B or higher, which include the areas between 14th and 16th Streets, NW, parts of Adams Morgan, areas between S and U Streets, NW, and sections of Florida Avenue, Calvert Street, and 16th Street. (2008.11)¹¹

⁶ 2006 DC Comprehensive Plan, p. 1-255.

⁷ 2006 DC Comprehensive Plan, pp. 1-255, 1-257.

⁸ 2006 DC Comprehensive Plan, p. 2-123.

⁹ 2006 DC Comprehensive Plan, p. 2-126.

¹⁰ 2006 DC Comprehensive Plan, p. 2-127.

¹¹ DC Comprehensive Plan p. 2-130.

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Additional policy statements strengthen the ~~trust~~^A of the present application:

Policy MC-1.1.1: Neighborhood Conservation: Retain and reinforce the historic character of Mid-City neighborhoods, particularly its row houses, older apartment houses, historic districts, and walkable neighborhood shopping districts. The area's rich architectural heritage and cultural history should be protected and enhanced. (2008.2)¹²

Policy MC-1.1.5: Conservation of Row House Neighborhoods: Recognize the value and importance of Mid-City's row house neighborhoods as an essential part of the fabric of the local community. Ensure that the Comprehensive Plan and zoning designations for these neighborhoods reflect the desire to retain the row house pattern. Land use controls should discourage the subdivision of single family row houses into multi-unit apartment buildings but should encourage the use of English basements as separate dwelling units, in order to retain and increase the rental housing supply. (2008.6)

The Comprehensive Plan's Implementation Element calls for the following action steps that relate to the neighborhood under review:

LU-2.1-A: Row House Zoning District. Develop a new zoning district or divide the existing R-4 district into R-4-A and R-4-B to better recognize the unique nature of row house neighborhoods and conserves their architectural form (including height, mass, setbacks, and design). Responsible Agencies: Office of Planning, Office of Zoning, Zoning Commission (309.17)¹³

LU-2.1-C: Residential Rezoning. Provide a better match between zoning and existing land uses in the city's residential areas, with a particular focus on: blocks of well-established single family and semi-detached homes that are zoned R-5-A or higher; blocks that consist primarily of row houses that are zoned R-5-B or higher; or historic districts where the zoning does not match the predominant contributing properties on the block face. In all three of these instances, pursue rezoning to appropriate densities to protect the predominant architectural character and scale of the neighborhood. Responsible Agencies: Office of Planning, Office of Zoning, Zoning Commission (309.19)¹⁴

H-1.3-A: Review Residential Zoning Regulations: During the revision of the city's zoning regulations, review the residential zoning regulations, particularly the R-4 (row house) zone. Make necessary changes to preserve row houses as single-family units to conserve the city's inventory of housing for larger households. Responsible Agencies: Office of Planning, Office of Zoning (505.1)¹⁵

¹² 2006 DC Comprehensive Plan, p. 2-128.

¹³ DC Comprehensive Plan, p. 1-56.

¹⁴ DC Comprehensive Plan, p. 1-56.

¹⁵ DC Comprehensive Plan, p. 1-119.

MC-1.1-A: Rezoning of Row House Blocks. *Selectively rezone well-established residential areas where the current zoning allows densities that are well beyond the existing development pattern. The emphasis should be on row house neighborhoods that are presently zoned R-5-B or higher, which include the areas between 14th and 16th Streets, NW, parts of Adams Morgan, areas between S and U Streets, NW, and sections of Florida Avenue, Calvert Street, and 16th Street. Responsible Agencies: Office of Planning, Office of Zoning, Zoning Commission. (2008.11)¹⁶*

¹⁶ DC Comprehensive Plan, p. 1-130.