



ZONING COMMISSION
District of Columbia

CASE NO. 07-34

EXHIBIT NO. 9

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Attachment No. 7

Area Zoning History

The zoning that exists today in the defined neighborhood dates back to 1958, when new zoning regulations for the entire city were written. The first draft of the regulations, prepared in 1956, called for low and moderate zoning for the Dupont Circle area, and most of the residential row house areas surrounding downtown. But by 1957, the freeway plan had been hatched, designed to enable suburbanites to commute easily and quickly to the downtown employment area. The federal planners envisioned residential areas surrounding downtown as natural places for high density apartment buildings. The freeway plan, which would have meant the destruction of 40,000 housing units, enraged citizens of Washington. In the area under consideration in this case, the north side of T Street was to be demolished, and all of Caroline Street as well as residential units on other corresponding blocks to the east and west to make way for a super highway which would cut a wide swath through the L'Enfant Plan. Almost all neighborhoods of the city united in a battle to defeat the freeway plan, a conflict which lasted over ten years. The zoning plan enacted in 1958 was drastically different from the draft plan of two years earlier, reworked as it was to enable the destruction of row houses so they could be replaced by much higher apartment buildings near downtown. The residents of DC won the battle against the freeway: the resulting solution was the subway system. But the citizens who lived near downtown were stuck with an obsolete zoning plan which threatened the fabric of their neighborhoods and did lead to the destruction of a number of original row houses near Dupont Circle on Corcoran Street, P Street, Q Street, and New Hampshire Avenue. Mansions such as the Hitt House on Dupont Circle, judged by architects as a jewel by John Russell Pope, were also demolished.

Beginning in the 1970s when the subway system opened, the Dupont Circle neighborhood initiated rezoning cases to remedy the situation. Eventually totaling four in number, the resulting down zoning cases achieved reduction in some forty-five blocks. Planned Unit Developments also were restricted in some areas. The objective of bringing zoning into conformity with actual land use in the neighborhood turned out to be only partially achieved, however.

In the 1980s, the Logan Circle community was successful in rezoning from R-5-B to R-4 a large residential area stretching north of Q Street to U Street, and from 14th Street to about Ninth Street. Whereas the majority of the row houses in that area of Logan Circle are three stories, the blocks for which R-4 is requested in this application contain mostly two-story row houses. (There is now no zoning category that appropriately accommodates these two-story houses.)

The streets that were populated by mostly two-story row houses, but were zoned too high in 1958, had been left out of the four rezoning cases. They were not perceived as threatened. Unforeseen was the burgeoning new construction and conversion to condominiums that the city is experiencing today. While these large buildings are appropriate for much of downtown and along thoroughfares like 14th Street, NW, to U Street, the character of nearby residential blocks needs to be protected from having their existing housing stock threatened by denser use. Row houses themselves are undergoing unfortunate changes. Already small two- and three-story row houses are being cut up into tiny units, since R-5-B has no minimum apartment size. The

attendant addition of inappropriate extra stories, as experienced in Columbia Heights and Washington Heights, needs to be checked. R-4 is the closest zone to protect the character of these blocks.

Another problem arose after 2000, when the Zoning Commission converted all buildings in the R-5-C zone to a new denser R-5-D zone, without any survey work to justify it. No input from citizens was heard by the Zoning Commission because communities were unaware of the proposal. The application of our zoning proposal will remedy that situation in the areas of 16th Street and New Hampshire Avenue, which were subjected to this odd across the board rezoning.

The Zoning Commission's approval of citizen-generated rezoning cases attests to its support of zoning consonant with the historic fabric of neighborhoods.

Purpose of Zoning Rationale

The purpose of this application is to redress inappropriate zoning in two areas by changing R-5-B to R-4, where the predominant use is two-story row houses, and by changing R-5-D to R-5-B, where the predominant use is three-story row houses. Further, we propose extending the existing Dupont Circle Overlay throughout the proposed rezoning area in order to protect the character of the existing historic districts, maintain the proposed density limits, and help protect light and air and encourage tree growth. When it was enacted, the existing Dupont Circle Overlay zoning ended at S Street, NW, an arbitrary boundary at the time between two wards. We believe that decision does not provide a good basis for planning.

Rationale for Lower Zoning Categories

This neighborhood initiative has the following goals:

- To bring existing zoning into conformance with actual use;
- To bring existing zoning into conformance the 2006 DC Comprehensive Plan;
- To retain the row house character of the overall neighborhood;
- To preserve open green space, trees, light, and air; and
- To preserve the scale and character of historic districts within which the zoning reduction area lies (noted above).

The application covers portions of areas that were not down zoned in four earlier cases brought in the 1970s. And the area overall has been fortunate to have survived as it is today without having had parts of its housing stock demolished for higher density dwellings. This is due in part to the fact that it is in one or another of four distinct historic districts mentioned above. Amending the existing zoning to lower densities will help retain the scale of the overall neighborhood.

This initiative is in line with the District of Columbia's 2006 Comprehensive Plan which promotes retaining the integrity of row house neighborhoods and our city's single family housing stock, and with the Office of Planning's long-term effort to review existing zoning citywide and

bring it into conformance with actual use and with the current Comprehensive Plan. We are fortunate not to have suffered the physical degradation and substantial subdivision of row houses already experienced in some areas of Columbia Heights. Thus, we believe this application is a timely one for your consideration.