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In support of Case #08-06-8, Low & Moderate Density Residential ZRR

I support the Low and Moderate Density Residential proposals from the Office of Planning.

Our current zoning system is a patchwork of confusing rules, zones and overlays. More importantly, it deprives planners and neighborhoods of some of the important tools they need to effectively manage growth in a way that enhances neighborhoods while also protecting their important characteristics. We can't currently require consistent setbacks without an overlay, or zone for two-story townhouses on blocks where all buildings are two stories. This plan will add those tools to the toolbox.

Some residents of my neighborhood recently rezoned their blocks from R-5-B to R-4. That process took several years. This proposal would simplify such a process. I was therefore surprised to hear one of those residents argue that this proposal would nullify the fruits of their hard work. I don't believe that is the case at all. This plan would actually help residents better tailor their local zoning to the realities of their neighborhoods. It would also maintain restrictions substantially similar to existing zoning unless and until neighborhoods, OP and the Zoning Commission participate in a process to change it.

Some people will tell you that the existing zoning overlays are critical to their neighborhoods. The Office of Planning has worked very hard to devise a system that will protect the important qualities of our overlays. We should not cling blindly to the specific overlays themselves at the expense of their purpose. Earlier this week, you held a hearing on a PUD proposal in Cleveland Park which the majority of residents favor. A Councilmember opposed it because of technical language in the overlay. This proposal will allow our neighborhoods to protect those characteristics that motivated the overlays while also providing some needed flexibility.

I also support the shift from static lists of permitted and prohibited uses to regulation based on impacts. I live in a residential zone and definitely would not want significantly increased amounts of noise, trash or rodents that might result from some types of commercial activity on my block. However, if commercial activities could take place without creating negative side effects, I would support those. We should enable some neighborhood-serving commercial or institutional uses in residential districts where they would be contextually appropriate, beneficial to the public, and minimal in their impacts. This proposal would help our neighborhoods improve and evolve while protecting existing residents as well.

The Office of Planning conducted numerous meetings on this process and even delayed to further study issues opponents had raised. I believe they have worked remarkably hard to create a zoning model that is strongly deferential to the needs of existing residents, while also adding the flexibility we need for a 21st Century city. I urge the Commission to support this proposal.

Thank you.

ZONING COMMISSION
CASE No. 08-06-8
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EXHIBIT No. 17
District of Columbia
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