

Chairman Anthony Hood & members of the Zoning Commission,

The Zoning Commission has adopted proposed zoning regulation changes as written by the D.C. Office of Planning. Citizens of the District feel that if adopted, this will impose major changes affecting what it is like to live in the District. Substantial changes are necessary to fix major flaws in the proposed rules.

The proposed regulations do not reflect the height limits that are called for in the Comprehensive Plan. The Comprehensive Plan directed the Zoning Commission to reduce maximum allowable heights from 40 feet in low-density residential zones to reflect what currently the predominant height is in a neighborhood.

Except for Georgetown, the Office of Planning has not done that. In certain cases, downtown buildings will be allowed to be 40 feet taller than is currently allowed. The area designated as downtown has been tripled in size.

There are also dramatic changes in parking requirements. Substantially reduced parking requirements will increase competition from apartment residents and commercial patrons for parking in residential neighborhoods adjacent to apartment buildings, schools, transit zones and downtown. The Census shows that in D.C. approximately one in three households are carless and two in three houses have at least one car.

Among the parking changes:

- Developers will not have to provide on-site parking for any use in a broadly defined downtown, which has been tripled in size to encompass the areas from the baseball stadium, along the river and then 23rd Street NW up to Dupont Circle, and east of North Capitol Street.
- Within half a mile of Metrorail stops and quarter of a mile of major bus routes, only one space must be provided for every six units/families. In order to provide more than two spaces for every three units, developers will have to provide mitigation or seek zoning relief. Currently one space is required for every two units.
- Single-family detached homes will no longer have to have garages or driveways unless they have alley access. Those with garages can convert them for alternative uses while cars move to the street.
- No on-site parking will be required for apartment buildings with five or fewer units.
- “Near” transit, the parking requirement for larger apartment buildings is less than one space per six units. Far from transit it is less than one space per three units.

In certain instances, commercial uses will be allowed by right in low-density residential areas and will not be required to have parking except for day-care.

- Accessory uses (home occupations and businesses): More than 175 types of businesses would be allowed as home-based occupations with a max of eight clients per hour.
- Commercial: In row house zones (R-3 and R-4), allowed uses include retail, art design and creation, and food and alcohol sales, among others. They will have to be located 500 feet or more from a commercial zone, operating at maximum from 7 a.m. to 10 p.m. with four employees. No more than six such establishments could be within 500 feet of your house. Liquor could not be consumed on-site; food could not be cooked on-site.

The proposed regulations will allow tenant suites by right in many instances: Internal tenant suites and external suites that are contained in existing accessory buildings, like garages, would be matter of right. The proposed regulations allow new external buildings to be built by right with approval needed only when rented. At that time tenant rentals would have to be approved by the Board of Zoning Adjustment and could have two floors, a height of 22 feet and a foot-print of 900 square feet.

The Zoning Commission should address each of these serious flaws before finalizing the zoning regulations that will govern development in the District of Columbia.