



Neighbors Inc.

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Washington DC 20040

November 4, 2013

Testimony for the DC Zoning Commission - Case #08-064

Subtitles A, W and X

Presented by Loretta Neumann, Neighbors Inc. Board Member and Past President

Chairman and members of the Zoning Commission, thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

Neighbors Inc. (NI) is a non-profit DC organization, founded in 1958 to foster and maintain integrated neighborhoods in North Washington, DC – the entire north end of Ward 4. Our membership includes Shepherd Park (including Colonial Village and North Portal Estates), Brightwood, Takoma and Manor Park. We have long been involved in zoning and other issues in these neighborhoods. I am a long-time DC resident (more than 40 years), was a former ANC commissioner, and have been active in several organizations that have taken stands on many zoning matters in Ward 4 and elsewhere in DC.

NI's current board was elected at the annual membership meeting on September 22, 2013. The first meeting of the new board was on Oct. 29, at which time the board discussed the proposed zoning re-write and voted for me to testify on their behalf at this hearing. Hence we were unable to provide a written statement to meet the Oct. 28 deadline.

To prepare, NI was loaned a copy of the ZRR draft text, dated July 29, 2013, from the chair of ANC 4B. It was surprising – a five-inch binder containing more than 900 pages of very technical text, with no indication of what portions were new, revised, or deleted. While I attended meetings sponsored by the Office of Planning in Ward 4 and elsewhere, I could **not determine whether what we had been told by OP was reflected in the ZRR document nor if any further changes had been made.** I went on-line to the OP summary of general changes, and found it to be so vague that it's virtually useless. And it is **impossible to tell whether the ZRR changes are consistent with the DC Comprehensive Plan.**

It was also surprising to find a section that I do not recall mentioned at the OP hearing in Takoma, namely in Subtitle H, Chapter 3, a **new "Takoma Neighborhood Mixed Use Zone (N-2).** It appears simply to combine current zoning with a commercial overlay that was adopted several years ago, but it's hard to tell. (We will provide a statement separately on this matter for the hearing on Nov. 13.)

I have checked with other organizations around DC and found them equally if not more perplexed. Despite the fact that OP has spent several years in developing the proposed changes, residents of DC have not been provided sufficient information to make an informed decision. Clearly more time and attention is needed. The hearings this week are much too cursory to provide sufficient response from the community.

Recommendations

Therefore, we cannot and will not respond now to the ZRR document developed by the Office of Planning, although we have interests in many sections of it (including but not limited to parking minimums, accessory dwelling units, size of PUDs and residential lots, and the Takoma N-2 zone, etc.). We do, however, have several recommendations relating to process and procedures.

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Our major recommendation therefore is that the Zoning Commission consider the hearings this week as merely preliminary and that you **delay any further consideration for at least 6 months** until the Office of Planning has provided new text that reflects the concerns of the citizens. During this time, the Commission should:

- (1) **Require OP to immediately prepare a new document** for citizen review that clearly shows the changes that are being proposed from current zoning (the current “cross walk” on the OP website is still too general to be of much use to residents);
- (2) **Direct OP to meet in smaller groups, at least at the ANC level**, to discuss the ZRR document with ANCs, community leaders and residents who seek clarifications and/or changes in the text to try to develop a consensus position;
- (3) Alternatively or in addition to face to face meetings, **ask OP to provide an on-line means of direct communication via a “chat” function or a “webinar”** in which community residents can raise questions to OP and discuss their concerns, make further recommendations, etc.
- (4) Then, as proposed in your announcement of these hearings, **hold another set of hearings to receive public response to the zoning text proposed by OP.**

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify.