

November 6th, 2013

Anthony Hood, Chairman
DC Zoning Commission
One Judiciary Square
441 4th Street NW, Suite 200S
Washington, DC 20001

RE: Zoning Case No. 08-06A, Subtitle D (Support for Accessory Apartments rule changes)

Testimony by Dorcas Adkins, 3814 Albemarle St. NW, Washington, DC 20016

Thank you for the chance to testify on this important subject.

We hear every day about the problems caused by suburban sprawl: air and water pollution, gridlocked traffic, and the disappearance of our precious farmlands and forests. The population of the DC area is projected to increase sharply in coming years and housing will be created for these people, either farther out in MD and VA or within the city with its developed transportation infrastructure. For reasons of environmental quality as well as quality of life, we have to hope that much of it will be created in the city. Our current low-density neighborhoods will become unsustainable with the projected population numbers. We owe it to the next generations to accept increases in density, whether they be in the form of new high-rise apartment buildings or accessory apartments created in basements, backyards and alleys. I feel we need both, and that the latter can provide much affordable housing stock where available space for new apartment buildings is unavailable.

For over thirty years I have owned a home in Tenleytown. When I bought it in the '80's it was priced within my moderate means but over time home values have increased six- or seven-fold. Now most of the houses around mine are owned by couples with dual professional careers. Young couples with children are unusual and stay-at-home parents almost unheard-of.

I am speaking in support of proposed zoning changes allowing accessory apartments so that some of my neighbors will be able to create low-cost housing units in their basements and their garages. As an ageing resident, I hope to stay in Tenleytown, as much as anything because it's a good place to live once you can no longer drive. A supply of more affordable housing is a sure way to enable me and others like me to do so. We can move into these units ourselves or take advantage of having as neighbors people who can provide needed services for us. As a bonus, we would see increased diversity among Tenleytown's residents, in race, in age, and in profession. A wider price range of housing stock would allow us to enjoy as neighbors a more varied group— house cleaners, maintenance workers, caregivers, and young families with children, many of whom now commute into the area from far out in the suburbs.

While I support the loosening of current restrictions on these units, I don't think it ^{goes} far enough.

I am disappointed to see that additions and new construction on garages are not included as matters-of-right. Most DC garages, including mine, need second stories added if they are to be practical as accessory dwellings. By requiring us to endure the expense and uncertainty of obtaining a special exception for this, the proposed zoning regulations effectively prevent us from undertaking garage renovations for fear of lengthy and expensive hearings with uncertain outcomes. I understand the need to control the scale of garage additions — this should be included in the matter-of-right provisions. And when some claim that new backyard neighbors could create a nuisance, I point to the sensible requirement that the property owner occupy either the main residence or the accessory apartment.

I urge the commissioners to reconsider requiring special exceptions for new construction and additions to garages. We very badly need these apartments in order to prevent the same number of homes from springing up in rural areas not yet developed, to allow older citizens to remain in their homes, and to provide much-needed diversity in many of the older low-density neighborhoods in DC.

Sincerely yours,

Dorcas Adkins

ZONING COMMISSION
District of Columbia
CASE NO.08-06A
EXHIBIT NO.247