

Testimony in SUPPORT of Case 08-06A, Subtitle D (Accessory Apartments)

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Good evening, I am here to express my strong support of the proposed updates to the DC zoning code – in particular, my support for the revisions concerning accessory apartments.

*Due to the time limitation, I will only present part of my written testimony. Although I am a member of Ward 3 Vision, I speak tonight on my own behalf and do not represent the organization.*

*As a native Washingtonian, I have seen the city change from a sleepy company town where the sidewalks rolled up at 8 p.m. to a vibrant, multi-cultural, youthful, happening place with more live theater per capita than New York city, and an exciting diversity of eating establishments – from food trucks to upscale dining.*

*It is high time the zoning code from the 1950's was revised to support the kind of growth that is now occurring and to enable even more sustainable, transit-oriented development. I believe the key areas addressed in the update: reduced parking minimums, more accessory apartments, corner stores, and simplifying the organization of the code, are all important steps towards this goal.*

*After my children graduated college, I sold the family home in Bethesda and moved to a condo in Tenleytown in search of a walkable, urban lifestyle. I find it is perfectly situated -- on top of metro and within a block of all basic necessities. It's amazing how much time I can save RUNNING errands.*

*But while condo living is ideal for this stage of my life, I am well aware that one size does NOT fit all. Families with kids, and even those without, may chose to live in a single family home in one of the many lovely neighborhoods in DC. For some of these homeowners and potential homebuyers, income from an accessory apartment can be the deciding factor whether or not they can afford to live in a detached house.*

I am aware of the opposition voiced on some of the listserves over the possible tenants accessory apartment. By requiring that the owner of the primary structure reside on the property, the proposed regulations nullify that concern. Most likely, the renters will be screened carefully and be good tenants and neighbors -- such as myself, my friends, and other members of my family have done. Here are some examples of where we have benefitted from this housing option:

- When I was first married, my husband took a short-term job in Toronto where we rented a basement apartment in a nice residential section of town, which was walking distance from his office. The proximity was crucial, because we were snowed in most of the winter!

- When my sister's husband accepted a teaching position at University of Texas, they moved from Detroit to Houston but could not buy another house before selling the one in Detroit. That took many months and they suffered a significant loss. This made them risk averse in Houston where the lack of zoning could cause major drop in house value. Instead they rented a carriage house -- behind the main house in a beautifully landscaped setting.
- When her elderly mother could no longer live independently, a close friend hired a live-in home health worker and provided a basement apartment for this woman and her husband. Later, after my friend had inherited the house, she rented the apartment to this same couple for many more years.
- When my 30 y.o. son switched careers to work as a chef, he moved back home to thriving DC and came to live with me. Once he starts to make a little more money, he would like to find his own place. But rather than move way out to Germantown or Leesburg, he might be able to afford an accessory apartment in town.
- Formerly, when I had been an empty nester whose footsteps echoed through the family home, I considered converting the basement into a rental apartment. However, I was deterred by the time, cost and uncertainty of going through the special exception process.

This last point is one reason I strongly support the proposed zoning rewrite. Under the new code, it would be a **matter of right** to convert space inside the home or an existing garage for use as an accessory unit. Only the construction of an addition or a new accessory building would trigger the need for review under the special exception process.

Admittedly, more accessory units will not solve the affordable housing problem, yet this is one piece of the puzzle in fostering inclusivity, which would benefit the aging population to remain in their homes and provide housing choices for the younger generation.

Please vote in favor of the proposed revisions to the zoning code to facilitate the creation of more accessory apartments. Thank you for your time.