

Oral Testimony by Allen Seeber upon ZRR Subtitle C, November 12, 2013

Commissioners, my name is Allen Seeber. I have lived at 39th and Military in Chevy Chase for almost 40 years. I have a substantial investment in property and social relationships in this city. When I was young, I rented a carriage house behind the Phillips. But when I married, I chose to live in Chevy Chase to raise a family. I “bought” into the neighborhood’s character – its low density, transportation options, schools, etc. Now I seem obligated to defend those assumptions to some who do not have at risk the kind and level of investment I have committed. I have no argument with yearnings for corner stores, uninhibited strolls, even carlessness. But I must take issue with OP’s imposition of “urbanist” ideology via the ZRR without attention to evidence or consequence. Age difference is not the issue here. It is common sense. *Do no harm.*

OP says car ownership is sliding. But the Council of Governments affirms that car ownership has been increasing every year in DC for the last decade. OP relies upon wishful thinking and nostrums to contend that “millenials” are pouring into DC and are loath to drive, increasing carlessness. The American Public Transport Association finds not only that this cohort prefers wi-fi on buses enroute to work, but also that millenial car ownership is 150 percent of DC’s citywide average. As multi-modal as they may be, these residents need a place to store their cars – if not underground, then on the street.

OP says developers should decide whether to build parking spaces, assuming that related cost savings will enhance housing affordability. But a market price is just that; developers’ profit spreads will be enhanced, not affordability. OP says current minimums generate unused parking spaces, citing City Line and Columba Heights. But those two sites are unique, proving nothing. OP has admitted in writing it can identify no other addresses for parking overproduction – its evidence is “anecdotal.”

OP is prepared to experiment with our neighborhoods but fails to grasp that parking spaces cannot be inserted under commercial buildings once built. Minimum off-street parking requirements have served the District well. ***At least one parking space should be required for every three multi-family units.*** DC is not pockmarked with above-ground parking facilities. Cars not stored underground will compete for parking spaces on neighborhood streets. It’s a zero-sum game. There is no evidence to support OP dreams that it can drive away cars without neighborhood harm. Indeed, statistically valid research in New York City contradicts OP’s view.

The community bears the brunt of regulatory and developer errors and omissions regarding parking. Off-street parking minimums represent our ounce of prevention. We have no pound of cure.

Allen Seeber
5406 39th Street NW