

Testimony before the DC Zoning Commission
Case No. 08-06A, Subtitle C
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Good Evening Zoning Commissioners and Staff! My name is Jim Schulman. I am a registered architect and a sustainability advocate, and I live and work in Ward 6. I am pleased to be able to comment upon some of the many proposed changes to the DC Zoning Code. With respect to the proposed changes in Subtitle C, I generally concur with reducing or eliminating minimum parking requirements. Although the reduction in parking minimums does not go as far as is needed for the long-term health and well-being of the District of Columbia and the Metropolitan Region, they do represent a significant improvement from the current Zoning Code. Reducing the heavy impacts of car-centric transportation planning and lifestyles is something with which our government leaders and agencies are actively grappling, and it is much to their credit. Ultimately we need to turn an already quite walkable municipality into a one where uses are so mixed that 90% of all of residents' jobs, housing, services, recreation and amenities are met within ½ mile. When that happens, less public and private money will need to be spent on transportation, and we will all be the wealthier for it! As a townhouse resident on Capitol Hill, I recognize that the proper way to address the high demand for street parking on residential streets is through reform of the Residential Parking Permit (RPP) rules, not necessarily via zoning. With greater restrictions on access to RPP's, it seems that zoning-wise we could reduce primary household parking minimums to below one per principal dwelling that has alley access.

On page C-63 I notice that off-site parking is stipulated at a maximum distance of 400' from the use or structure. Prince George's County allows off-site parking to be within 500'. Are the residents of Prince George's County able to walk further than DC residents? I think not, and urge the off-site parking distance to err on the side of liberality. We want to encourage folks to walk a little bit further.

I believe Inclusionary Zoning is among the most important improvements to our Zoning Code in recent times, even if it has not yet had the opportunity to be proven in a thriving economy. On page C-101 I see that Inclusionary Zoning is not applied to all zoning districts. Perhaps there are functional reasons for these exclusions. In any case, I would like the reasons for such exclusions to be clearly stated in the text of the Zoning code – or otherwise be eliminated.

My primary interest is to see that the Zoning Map and Comprehensive Plans delineate our human settlement patterns as an organism with fully-integrated but differentiated uses and functions. The Zoning Code, even as proposed, is still very much about segregating rather than integrating uses – and this is essentially why it protects vested property interests pretty much as they existed in the 1940's. But this criticism pertains more to the map than it does to the code. Changing the name of existing Commercial zones to "Mixed Use" zones is a toe in the water. Preserving (by right) & encouraging more locally-owned corner stores providing fresh food and other health-supportive products and services in residential areas in the zoning code is also a welcome move. It does not, however, significantly move the full spectrum of community services into residential neighborhoods, except along overly-long commercial corridors that could have more flourishing nodes of mixed-use activity, through careful zoning, or even form-based zoning, as has been used successfully along Columbia Pike in Arlington County.

I also note that land owned by the Federal or District Governments, as of 1990, is exempted entirely from Zoning (on page A-10). If our region is to have a chance of integrating its land-use functions, green infrastructure, and human activity, all land, regardless of ownership, should be zoned. If the Federal Government bristles at having to comply with local laws, please urge the NCPC to develop its own "Federal Interest" Zoning rules – or otherwise abide by those developed by and for the citizens who reside in the Federal District.

I thank you for this opportunity to share my views, and I would be happy to attempt to answer any questions.