

Testimony by Eric Fidler, 439 Elm St NW, Washington, DC 20001
Before the D.C. Zoning Commission
RE: ZC No. 08-06A, Subtitle C – Parking Requirements
November 12, 2013

Good evening. My name is Eric Fidler and I am a resident of 439 Elm Street NW in LeDroit Park. I am here tonight to express my support for the Office of Planning's update to the zoning code.

I'm originally from this area, but when I was looking to buy a home a few years ago, I only looked at DC for numerous reasons, but especially due to its walkability, which few jurisdictions can match. I wanted to live in a place where I could easily walk to a coffee shop, a restaurant, a grocery store, and a Metro station. We are blessed to have many neighborhoods in our city that provide these features, largely because much of our city was built before parking requirements.

Since I first testified on this case, the original 08-06, three years ago, I've had more time to think about and study parking requirements. Opposition to lower parking requirements always stems from the fear that residents in these new buildings will do exactly what opponents are doing: they will park on the street. After all, the DC Government basically gives away parking permits for \$35 a year, about \$3 a month.

In his book The High Cost of Free Parking, UCLA economics professor Donald Shoup proves the subtle damages caused by ample parking. The most interesting mistake he notes is one you will see over and over again tonight. In economics, you cannot talk about supply and demand without talking about price. Many opponents tonight will argue that DC doesn't have enough parking, but they will neglect to say anything about price.

When people say there's not enough parking on the street, what they really mean is that there is not enough street parking at \$3 a month. Once we start discussing price, we

start to see that price is the main culprit, not supply. In fact, in neighborhoods where curbside parking is scarce, not a single person in this room (unless there's a councilmember here) can fix that. We can set parking ratios at 10 spaces per unit and require parking 10 stories down into the bowels of the earth, but that will barely affect the availability of street parking because the price differences are so stark.

Constructing and maintaining a human-habitable space underground is expensive and can range from \$30,000 to \$60,000 per space to build, never mind the cost of running elevators, pumping water, running fans, fixing leaks. Even if rented at a breakeven point, many spaces will remain empty because street parking is just so cheap compared to this. But it gets worse: these losses are simply passed onto tenants, embedded in their rent, whether they drive or not, whether they own a car or not.

Shoup makes the great observation that parking requirements are a policy of affordable housing for cars. Unfortunately it comes at the cost of housing affordability for people.

Furthermore, when the government requires parking, it puts its finger on the scales and tips them in favor of driving by forcing people to pay for it whether they use it or not. Driving is premised on parking and more parking will mean more driving, which damages air quality, generates more traffic, and encourages the creation of a pedestrian-hostile built environment, which itself begets more driving in a vicious circle.

I wish OP had stuck with the original idea of eliminating, rather than halving, these requirements, but OP, though countless meetings over several years has struck a good balance between residents' opposing views.

I strongly urge the Commission to approve OP's draft without delay.