

Testimony of Sara Green, Advisory Neighborhood Commissioner 4B01
7106 Piney Branch Road, NW, DC 20012
Zoning Commission Case No. 08-06A
"N" Zones – Takoma Neighborhood Mixed Use Zone & Mixed Use Zones
November 13, 2013

Good evening:

This is testimony that I am submitting on behalf of myself. You already have ANC 4B's recommendations, which I fully support.

The purpose of this testimony is to add additional points.

Takoma Neighborhood Mixed Use Zone

Frankly, I am not sure if the proposed Takoma Neighborhood Mixed Use Zone would permit an increase in the height or FAR of new commercial or residential development over the existing provisions in the Takoma Central District Plan. Mr. Joel Lawson, of the Office of Planning, and I had an email exchange about this that did not seem conclusive or clear to me.

One of my concerns is the list of Squares in the OP proposal. It seems that some of those parcels of land have existing uses which are divided between residential and commercial. What is the impact of including these specific pieces of land in a zoning revision? Again, it's not clear to me.

To me, the best way to handle these concerns is to emphasize that the ZRR should retain the provisions and the supporting language in the Takoma Central District Plan.

Here are some key excerpts from the Plan. I think the best way to approach the Takoma Neighborhood Mixed Use Zone in the ZRR is to simply include the following language from the Takoma Central District Plan in whatever you adopt.

"Preserve and enhance Takoma's small town/village character." (Page 7 of the Takoma Central District Plan)

"Encourage a neighborhood scale for new development. New commercial and residential development should be neighborhood-driven in scale and approach. New residential and commercial buildings should be no more than 2 -4 stories in height to match existing neighborhood scale." (Page 8 of the Takoma Central District Plan).

The new language in the ZRR could include the Takoma Overlay Zone, which was approved shortly after the adoption of the Central District Plan. The overlay permits a maximum height of 55 feet in the C-2-A zone for mixed-use buildings to accommodate 14-foot ceilings on the first floor. This gives retailers and developers the tools they need to come to Takoma, provide good products and services, and earn a profit.

As noted in ANC 4B's resolution, Takoma is experiencing a building boom, with new housing and retail now under construction or soon to be constructed. **The height, FAR, and side and rear yard provisions of the Takoma Central District Plan do not need to be changed to encourage more development. It's happening now.**

Another key concern is the language in the proposed Takoma Mixed-Use Zone that calls for new development that is "**generally** compatible" (emphasis added) with the existing community. The word "**generally**" needs to

be cut. It signals that OP would like the ability to support increased densities and heights that would be ***incompatible*** with the surrounding homes and apartments.

Whatever you adopt should make it clear that all new development must be "***compatible***" with its neighbors. Period. The word "***generally***" needs to be cut. This means that 55 feet is a maximum and only when retail is present on the first floor. Other development should be capped at 4 stories.

Of note also is the process OP uses to engage communities and tailor zoning and economic development tools to each neighborhood.

Georgetown was able to customize its new zoning regulations via a series of community meetings with the Office of Planning. Takoma should be accorded the same process.

Revise the Existing Large Tract Review Process To Make It Work

The existing Large Tract Review Process (50,000 sq. feet or more) does not give the community or the ANCs any meaningful role in commenting on new development that has a significant impact on the surrounding homes and businesses.

In fact, the Office of Planning refused to give ANC 4B "great weight" with respect to the Large Tract Review for the new Walmart at Georgia and Military Roads. The Attorney General had to step in to require that OP give ANC 4B its "great weight" for this and other Large Tract Review cases.

This was a discouraging and telling response from OP. The "great weight" requirement is a very low bar for community engagement. The only thing that OP is required to do under "great weight" is write a letter which addresses the Commission's concerns – no more. **The fact that OP fought even this very minor requirement and had the Attorney General's Office spend time responding to it is more evidence that OP is not giving communities a meaningful role in shaping new development. It supports our request that the ZRR fix this serious problem.**

Therefore, I strongly support ANC 4B's proposal that the Large Tract Review process be replaced with a Special Exception. New retail developments of 50,000 square feet or more should be approved by Special Exception. Under this process the same reviews would continue -- transportation, environmental, etc. However, residents and ANCs would be heard in a public hearing and could not be ignored by OP or other city agencies as is happening now.

Thank you for listening to these concerns!