

Testimony in Support of Case 08-06A, Subtitle C – Parking

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Good evening and thank you for the opportunity to testify. I am Jason Broehm, and I live in Columbia Heights at 3542 10th Street NW. I support the proposed update to the D.C. zoning code, particularly the changes that would modernize outdated parking requirements, and I strongly urge the Zoning Commission to revise D.C.'s 1950s-era zoning regulations to encourage continued progress toward making D.C. an even more vibrant city where it is easy to get around by foot, bicycle and transit.

Nearly 14 years ago, I sold my car and moved to D.C. to start my career. Over this time, I have chosen to live in walkable neighborhoods that are well served by transit – Adams Morgan, Dupont Circle and now Columbia Heights. I love this city, and I have spent my free time volunteering to make it better. I spent a decade as a local Sierra Club leader, advocating for more environmentally-friendly transportation policies, including leading a campaign to encourage the D.C. government to build an expansive 37-mile streetcar network. And for the last three and a half years, I have served on the D.C. Pedestrian Advisory Council, seeking to help the D.C. government make it safer and easier to walk across all parts of our city. During my time living in D.C., I have witnessed significant progress, but we can and must do more.

Our 1950s-era zoning code is product of a much different era – one in which the car was king, gas prices were low, the suburbs were growing, and roads were being built to support transportation in and out of cities. A lot has changed in the last 50 years, and D.C.'s zoning code is long overdue for an update to reflect the 21st century realities we face: our population is growing again after decades of decline; we now have the Metro system; 38.5 percent D.C. households do not own a car; gas prices are expected to continue to rise, and we must become more sustainable as we seek to address climate change.

When former Mayor Anthony Williams set a goal of increasing D.C.'s population by 100,000, I recall a fellow advocate reframing it in transportation terms as achieving that population goal “without the nightmare of 100,000 more cars.” As D.C.'s population has increased, fortunately our leaders have supported better walking and bicycling infrastructure, car sharing, bike sharing and transit expansion to promote mobility without the need to own a car, and many residents now live car-free or car-light lifestyles. Unfortunately, existing zoning regulations create incentives to provide parking for more cars than may be necessary or desirable. And if you build more spaces, you're likely to attract more cars. These parking spaces also entail costs that are passed on to homeowners and renters, increasing mortgages and rents whether they own a car or not and making housing less affordable.

The Office of Planning's (OP) proposal to decrease parking minimums on sites located near transit, remove minimum parking requirements downtown, and encourage car sharing and bike parking constitutes an important step forward. Easing parking requirements can help incentivize people to get around the city by foot, bicycle and transit, and encourage more walkable, vibrant and affordable neighborhoods.

In closing, I urge you to support the Office of Planning's proposed update to the D.C. zoning code to bring our parking policies into the 21st century.