

Testimony on Zoning Case No. 08-06A, Subtitle C: General Provisions

My name is Tom Quinn and I am an ANC Commissioner on ANC 3E representing the eastern side of Friendship Heights.

To be explicitly clear I am not testifying tonight on behalf of ANC 3E but as this body is well aware ANC 3E has demonstrated with its actions before this commission that it can support parking free buildings in the appropriate context.

I originally had a paragraph in here stating my bona fides as a DC resident – where and how long I have lived here, my families long connection to DC and so on but frankly that talk is insulting and condescending to younger Washingtonians who are politically engaged and working hard to improve this ever evolving city whose voices should be given every bit as much weight as the older Washingtonians who are also engaged in this process and whose activism over the years did much to make the city as great as it is today.

Unfortunately that tug and pull between the status quo and the need for change has dominated the public hearings about the Zoning Re-write.

But more unfortunate was the fact that the myriad working groups that the Office of Planning organized and that I occasionally participated in to discuss the Zoning Re-write were largely populated with the faces of long term residents who by and large were participating to ensure that as little changed about the current zoning as possible.

Sadly the source of the fiercest opposition to the Office of Planning's proposed changes in both earlier and the current draft has been to changes in required parking minimums.

And frustratingly DCOP has significantly compromised on the original proposal to create transit corridors with no required parking minimums to the point where the current proposal on parking minimums goes too far to appease opponents.

The status quo of minimum parking requirements in areas with abundant transit service has been a failure.

My own experience as a resident of Ward 3 and my exposure to information about parking inventories in Upper NW suggests the Wisconsin Avenue corridor is already oversaturated with off-street commercial parking spaces.

And we also have communities with streets swamped by drivers seeking out free parking on residential side streets.

In Friendship Heights none of the commercial parking garages have high occupancy rates – not during the week, not during the holiday season and definitely not on the weekend and the utilization rate is so low that one commercial building is no longer available for weekend parking.

A similar situation exists in Tenleytown – despite featuring free validated parking the 2 primary commercial parking lots in Tenleytown are both underutilized.

Despite this all of the recent proposals for new residential and commercial projects in Upper NW have included massive numbers of parking spaces that in most cases greatly exceed what is required under the current zoning law:

American Universities new law school in Tenleytown – 400 parking spaces

5333 Connecticut Avenue – 214 parking spaces for 261 units

Park Van Ness – 226 parking spaces for 273 units

New Safeway @ Wisconsin & Ellicott - 340 parking spaces for approximately 222 apartments and the new grocery store

Development @ Marten's site also at Wisconsin & Ellicott – 175 parking spaces for approximately 200 apartments

So this shines a light on the fact that under the current law the existing minimums have done nothing to discourage the inclusion of high ratios of parking spaces and given the percentage of car free households in the District particularly in multi-unit buildings if anything these recent developments suggest that the Office of Planning should have kept its proposal for parking maximums. These facts highlight just what a compromise the current proposal represents.

But to circle back to where I started referencing the Babe's project in Tenleytown that project would have been difficult to build on that site meeting the existing parking minimums for the combined residential and commercial usages and would have certainly involved trade-offs.

In this particular case including underground parking would have precluded a level of retail and would have necessitated tearing out the existing foundation which would have increased costs and the environmental impact of the project.

But most telling to me is that a PUD which included almost a 1 to 1 parking ratio was previously approved for the site but was never built despite having been active during a red hot real estate market which suggests a small project like this with a large number of parking spaces was not economically viable.

And it is small projects like Babe's where an underground parking requirement and the cost of gaining relief can combine to prevent redevelopment from ever happening on marginal lots for which this Zoning Re-write is so important.

Finally I would like to add that on-street parking pressure and the associated traffic along with the frustration residents feel when they have trouble finding parking near their homes is a real concern for some people in my Single Member District.

But the problem is not a lack of off street parking – the problem is that the on-street parking is not appropriately priced or even priced at all which leads to a wild imbalance between supply and demand.

The solution to the problems of on-street parking demand is management of on-street parking supply but the Zoning re-write and the Zoning Commission is not the appropriate forum for resolving this problem.

The Office of Planning has regrettably already watered down the reductions in required parking minimums in the Zoning Re-write but the new regulations as proposed still represent a tangible improvement on the current law and for that reason merit your support.

Thank you for the amount of time you have allotted to enable all interested parties to speak out and participate in the final step of this long and inclusive process.

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