

Testimony by Mitchell Crispell, Member of Jews United for Justice

Before the D.C. Zoning Commission

RE: ZC No. 08-06A, Subtitle C – Chapter 19 –Parking requirements

November 19, 2013

My name is Mitchell Crispell. I live in Logan Circle and am a life-long Washington area resident. Tonight I am speaking on behalf of Jews United for Justice, as well as based on my own personal experiences. I wish to express our support for lowering off-street parking minimum requirements.

The parking minimum policies you set will affect whether our city can effectively address our affordable housing crisis. In my previous work as a housing counselor, I met with tenants all over town, helping them understand their rights, improve housing conditions, and pursue the tenant purchase process. Top on the minds of my clients was affordability. Many of them lived in rapidly-changing neighborhoods, like Columbia Heights, where we have a serious shortage of affordable units. Even in less gentrified areas, in recent years we have lost many more affordable units than we've gained. Rents go up but workers' paychecks stay the same, and, increasingly, renters face falling behind on rent, displacement, or even homelessness.

Part of the solution to our affordable housing crisis is to lower off-street parking minimum requirements. These requirements raise the cost of housing by forcing developers to build more parking than people want to buy. The dollars spent building unnecessary parking spaces could go towards building more housing units, or towards creating more affordable units. Lower minimums allow developers to build what is actually demanded by the market, and not waste money and space on unneeded parking spots.

These regulations are particularly crucial for affordable housing developers, who are trying to maximize the number of units they build. Each dollar spent on parking takes away from money that could go towards more units. Few of my clients owned cars; what they needed was a decent home they could afford.

We know that low-income city residents are less likely to own cars. Middle-income people are also choosing to go car-less in increasing numbers. Today, 38% of D.C. households are car free. Our zoning regulations should recognize this.

The proposed regulations allow true parking demand to be met, lower housing costs, and encourage what we need most of all—affordable housing units.

I am also here representing Jews United for Justice. Our over six thousand local members join together to pursue justice and equality in our city and region. Embedded in our Jewish tradition is the concept of tikkun olam (repairing the world), which teaches us that as Jews we have a responsibility to lift up the concerns of marginalized people, both within and outside our

community. We work on campaigns such as, in recent years, marriage equality and the DREAM Act in Maryland and paid sick days for all and a higher minimum wage in the District of Columbia.

My previous comments reflect the values and positions of Jews United for Justice. Additionally, we believe the city should allow new housing development to "right size" the parking supply to meet demand rather than build a government-mandated minimum. The zoning code should support a mix of accessible, affordable ways to get around town—things like transit, carsharing, bikesharing, walking and other new transportation options, as well as appropriate infrastructure for cars. When more people go car-free, driving and parking are easier for drivers of all income levels who truly need cars because they have mobility issues or difficult commutes. High parking minimums move us in the opposite direction by encouraging and subsidizing more cars that aren't needed.

In these hearings, I'm sure you'll hear about the effects of the proposed zoning changes on on-street parking. I encourage you to leave that issue up to its appropriate regulator, the District Department of Transportation. The economics is straightforward: Even as new developments have built more parking than residents want to rent or buy, street parking remains tight in popular neighborhoods. This is because on-street parking is practically free. Free on-street parking lowers the market price for off-street parking, because building managers must offer parking spots at a price that appeals to drivers who might otherwise get street parking for free. The off-street spots are then priced lower than their costs and developers make up the difference in rent levels. This means that other residents of the building—who may not even own a car!—are subsidizing a car owner. The only way to address competition around street parking is to manage it, which is DDOT's job. You should not seek to solve the problem of a lack of sufficient on-street parking by writing a zoning code that creates off-street parking spots that drivers don't want to pay for. Pass zoning regulations that make sense for the city we're trying to create, and leave the issue of on-street parking to DDOT to manage.

I am here to stay. The DC area has always been my home, and I intend for it to be the place I get married, buy a home, raise children, and retire. I want to live in a city where a high-paid lobbyist and the minimum-wage worker who prepares her lunch can both live with dignity. I want to live in a city free of traffic jams and free of air pollution. I want to hop on the bus for a quick ride—because most people opt to ride the bus and fewer people need to drive and create traffic that holds up said bus. Parking minimums are not the silver bullet to creating such a place, but they are key.

The proposal before you, the product of five years of dialogue between the Office of Planning and residents from every ward and neighborhood of the city, is a solid compromise that will retain, but reduce, parking minimums. It is an important part of ensuring a vibrant and inclusive city in the years to come. On behalf of the Jews United for Justice community and as a proud Washingtonian, I encourage you to adopt the proposed changes to the parking regulations.

Thank you for your time tonight as well as the many other long hours you put in on behalf of the District.