

Lane McFadden
331 14th Street NE
Washington, DC 20002

Re: In SUPPORT of Zoning Case No. 08-06A, Subtitle D (corner stores)

DC Zoning Commission
One Judiciary Square
441 4th Street NW, Suite 200 South
Washington, DC 20001
Anthony Hood, Chairman

11/25/2013

Dear Chairman Hood and the D.C. Zoning Commission:

I am writing in support of the proposed changes to the DC Zoning Code, in particular the text of Subtitle D as set down on September 9, 2013, regarding corner stores. My own neighborhood in Ward 6 (east of Capitol Hill and southwest of Rosedale) would benefit greatly from this improvement to our city's zoning regulations. We live in what is considered a low-to-medium density residential neighborhood, but nevertheless there are a lot of us on each block who routinely need a dozen eggs or a head of lettuce. Although we are fortunate to be served by a number of good grocery stores, we nevertheless live in an area where going to the grocery store still requires bundling the family into a car instead of a quick walk around the corner. Our blocks were obviously built with corner stores in mind, but nearly all those corner buildings now sit empty. A change to the zoning code could quickly bring about new grocery options for our local neighborhoods that would be very, very welcome.

I believe this update to the zoning code would **1) improve the social fabric of our neighborhood; 2) increase public safety; and 3) improve access to healthy food.** Every time our neighbors leave their house for the sidewalk instead of for their car, they increase opportunities to see and visit with other neighbors and visitors to our community. This, in turn, binds everyone closer together and that stronger sense of community is what motivates folks to put in the hard work necessary to improve things. Currently, the only social gathering place our nearby neighbors have is the playground, which is great for families of young children but means that we don't have a chance to visit with older members of the community or people without children. Just the simple act of saying hello at the corner grocery store is an important part of living in a vibrant community, and I believe that it can help retain the diversity of the neighborhood by providing a place where everyone will go and run into one another. After all, everyone in the neighborhood eats food, be they young or old, wealthy or not. Reducing car trips, increasing social interactions, and making the neighborhood more convenient for residents that don't get around very well will improve everyone's happiness.

Second, I would welcome the presence of more commercial activity in our neighborhood, especially at night. Although MPD has done a good job bringing crime down in our area in recent years, we still endure a lot of muggings and thefts (especially of purses and phones, and of items in cars). Increasing the number of people on

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the streets in the evening going to and from the stores, and the likelihood that MPD officers will be out of their cars either visiting or checking on the stores, can only help put "eyes on the street" which in turn will help discourage crime and make our neighborhood safer and happier. I would imagine that in other wards, where crime is an even worse problem than in our own, this difference will be felt even more.

Third, I applaud the decision of the Office of Planning to recommend grocery stores as a matter of right, and I hope the Zoning Commission will adopt that proposal. In my own ward, this is a matter of improved convenience, increasing the likelihood my family will cook a healthy meal rather than have a less healthy one delivered. But in other parts of our city, especially in Wards 7 and 8, a corner grocery store might be the only reasonable location nearby for fresh produce and other nutritious, unprocessed foods. This is a matter of great importance to our city, could improve residents' health as well as their quality of life, and the zoning code should facilitate these improvements or at the very least do nothing to impede them.

I also support the amendment to permit a special exception process for approving other, non-grocery forms of retail, as a good compromise from the Office of Planning's original proposals. However, I would be even more in favor of expanding the amendment to allow matter-of-right development of a wider array of nondisruptive commercial activities. A corner grocery will enhance the social fabric of our neighborhood, but adding a yoga studio or art gallery or bookstore or coffeeshop or reading room or florist would enhance it even more, without reason to worry about noise or large crowds or pollution. I urge the Office of Planning to consider expanding this proposal to be even more receptive to the possibility of commercial activities on properties that meet the guidelines described in the Office of Planning's Corner Store Fact Sheet (October 2013). I rely on the fact sheet because I confess that the intricacy of the zoning code itself is a bit difficult for me to follow accurately.

I recently attended a presentation by the Capitol Hill Restoration Society at which one of its spokespeople spread a surprising amount of misinformation about this proposed update to our zoning code. She told a crowd of people from our own neighborhood that the Commission is considering a change that would "let anyone open a 7-Eleven in any house in the row, with almost no restrictions." As the Commission well knows, this is wholly inaccurate. I hope that the Commission is not swayed by objection letters based on this kind of misinformation. I also hope that the Commission realizes that groups with a neighborhood's name in their title do not represent all the residents of that particular neighborhood.

In sum, please approve the amendment allowing corner grocery store development as of right, and approving a special exception process for other commercial activities in those properties. This matter has been debated for years and I look forward to the Zoning Commission finally approving this update to our zoning code so that we might have a 21st-century set of regulations to match our 21st-century lifestyles. I previously testified in person in favor of reducing parking minimums (Zoning Case 08-06A, Subtitle C), and I incorporate here by reference that portion of my testimony in which I urged the Commission to devise regulations that no longer privilege automobile owners and drivers so greatly above other residents of DC.

Thank you for considering my testimony.

Sincerely,

