

GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

ADVISORY NEIGHBORHOOD COMMISSION 3B GLOVER PARK AND CATHEDRAL HEIGHTS



Testimony of Brian A. Cohen Chair, Advisory Neighborhood Commissioner 3B, Representing Glover Park and Cathedral Heights Zoning Commission Hearing January 30, 2014

On behalf of Advisory Neighborhood Commission 3B, representing the communities of Glover Park and Cathedral Heights in Northwest DC, I urge you to approve the draft revisions to the zoning code.

ANC 3B has been monitoring the ongoing discussion over these revisions, and has provided numerous opportunities for our constituents to learn about and comment on the proposed changes to the zoning code.

We hosted a representative from the Office of Planning at a public meeting in December 2012. In February 2013, the five ANC 3B commissioners unanimously supported a resolution in support of the zoning rewrite. I have attached a copy of this resolution to my testimony.

The ANC 3B position, memorialized in our February 2013 resolution, has not changed: we continue to support the rewrite. The five-year process has allowed for ample community education and input; representatives from the Office of Planning and Office of Zoning have visited communities, heard from residents, and addressed concerns. It is time to move forward to update the District's out-of-date zoning code.

I understand the temptation to maintain the status quo. And I hope that as you consider the Zoning Proposal, you don't succumb to theoretical worst-case scenarios that are nothing but efforts to scare you away from change. Sure, it's possible that if you allow by-right creation of accessory dwelling units a "bad tenant" could move into one of those ADU's. But the same tenant could move into an existing dwelling under current housing laws. And more importantly, there are existing agencies in the District - DCRA, MPD, and others - whose job it is to protect District residents from these outcomes. The same fact holds true for any concerns regarding negative impacts from parking changes or neighborhood stores.

I have no doubt that the changes under discussion are good for our city, and our city's residents, and are consistent with the long-term vision contained in the Comprehensive Plan for the Nation's Capital.

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I would like to address three controversial areas under discussion in the current draft.

The updated draft makes reasonable allowances for local corner stores in rowhouse residential areas, including Glover Park. These stores will provide community residents with the ability to walk a short distance to local, neighborhood-friendly stores; they will enrich our neighborhood fabric and provide easy access to daily necessities. Neighborhoods like Capitol Hill and Georgetown that already have these corner stores are some of the most beloved and sought-after communities in our city.

The updated draft proposal offers improved options for homeowners to create accessory dwelling units. The neighborhoods positively affected by these proposed changes include Glover Park and Cathedral Heights. These units create more affordable housing, increase the value of existing housing stock, allow for neighborhood population growth without modifying existing building density, and can provide an income source to allow seniors to age in place in their own homes.

The proposal also contains reasonable limits on accessory dwelling to prevent overcrowding of neighborhoods or accessory dwellings that are not consistent with the fabric of traditional residential neighborhoods.

Accessory dwellings would improve quality of life for those who live here now, and provide space for new, vibrant residents of the District. We therefore support changes to the zoning code that would make it easier to create accessory dwelling units.

The updated draft proposal contains limited changes to current mandated parking minimums.

Current parking minimums undermine market forces, increase housing costs, reduce incentives to use mass transit, and damage the historic and walkable form of many neighborhoods. The changes proposed in the draft zoning code - which are most significant for downtown and areas well served by transit, would mitigate these problems.

They would allow room for automobiles, but create new incentives and opportunities for environmentally- and neighborhood-friendly transportation options: walking, car- and bike-sharing, and mass transit.

These changes would apply to Wisconsin Ave. in Glover Park and Cathedral Heights, which is served by numerous bus lines. We support the proposed changes to the zoning code with regard to parking minimums.

Members of the Zoning Commission, the proposed changes are not radical; they are long overdue modifications to an out-of-date, 1950's zoning vision.

The proposed zoning changes will make our neighborhoods and the District of Columbia as a whole a better place to live, work, and play - not just for future residents, but

for those who live in the District of Columbia today. On behalf of ANC 3B, I hope you will approve these changes in an expeditious fashion.