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Washington, DC 20012

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

Re: Zoning Case No. 08-06A, Subtitle D

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

First, I want to congratulate the Office of Planning for years of concerted efforts on the zoning rewrite. It has been a model for transparent, positive, inclusive process. Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

My husband and I recently moved to Washington, DC and are looking forward to starting and raising a family. We are both working and actively involved in our neighborhood in Takoma and our local church congregation. We feel very strongly that strong families will help the public schools and strengthen the community. However, our experience from talking with other families is that once you have two kids, you are priced out and forced to move to the suburbs. I feel that we are not alone in wanting to raise a family in the city. It is very discouraging when we only see new buildings that are offering "luxury apartments." The city desperately needs more 3 bedroom affordable units, whether those are condos or small, dense houses.

In submitting these comments pertaining to ADU's, I am primarily motivated out of concern for affordable housing in the District, where we have lost half our affordable housing in the past 10 years, and where median home values have doubled since 2000 to \$400K today. In this time rents have also increased approximately 50%, and today a quarter of DC renters are spending half their income on housing. I believe responsibly allowing the growth of ADU's is one simple measure we can take to expand affordable housing options for DC residents, allowing lower cost housing for low income residents and interns, as well as aging in place by older residents. Allowing residential use on the 600+ DC alley lots is also a way of increasing affordable housing.

With this in mind, I respectfully submit the following comments:

I strongly support the current language in Chapter 16 Use Permissions R Zones that allows an accessory apartment by right in the R zones, and by special exemption in R-19 and R-20 (Section 1606.2, 1606.3). I also support parking reforms as currently stand in the draft, as a compromise that can support ADUs.

Under 1606.4 pertaining to ADU's, I understand the Board may waive up to 2 of the conditions set forth in 1606.4.g (and potentially more with a variance). However the Special Exemption process, by requiring a public hearing, can be time consuming, and I feel that several of the conditions set forth here are unnecessary and onerous. Thus I strongly oppose certain conditions of the draft language under sections:

1606.4(a): Minimum lot areas. I feel that the current minimum lot area requirements (4,000-7500 ft²) are excessive and would unduly impact the development of affordable ADU's across the city. A perfectly livable accessory dwelling unit may be built in a 300ft² footprint, on a 1600ft² lot with an existing two floor, 1500ft² row house, even with proscribed setbacks. Minimum lot areas should be reduced to 1600ft² under this section for all R zones.

1606.4(e): *If the (accessory dwelling) apartment is located in the principal dwelling the following*

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conditions shall apply: (1) The house shall have at least two thousand square feet (2,000 sq. ft.) of gross floor area, exclusive of garage space. The current rule is discriminatory against those who have smaller homes who wish to have an ADU. I believe this minimum house size requirement should be reduced to 1000 ft2. There are many row houses in DC with 1200-1500 ft2 of living space that have basement units that can easily be used as an ADU. Furthermore, there are micro units currently allowed under DC code (and being developed by PN Hoffman at the Wharf project) of 300 ft2, thus a small house with interior ADU that totals 1000ft2 seems entirely reasonable.

1606.4(f) (An accessory building that houses an accessory apartment shall comply with the following conditions...).

(1) The accessory building was in existence on January 1, 2013; I believe newer accessory buildings should be allowed an accessory apartment without a specific Board waiver (per 1606.4.g) if other conditions are complied with.

(5) Easement for permanent passage of 10 ft in width from front of house, or through an alley in back with a alley width minimum 24ft. The easement language appears to effectively preclude ADU's at all row houses in DC with shared walls. In addition, the majority of DC alleys are less than 24 ft2 (average 10-15 feet wide), so here too. I support eliminating the 1606.4.f.5.A, and reducing 1606.4.f.5.B to 15 feet.

(8) An accessory building constructed as a by right accessory building after January 1, 2013 shall not be used as, or converted to, an accessory apartment except by special exception for a period of five years after the approval of the building permit for the accessory building. I oppose any time limitations on use of private property as an accessory dwelling, and recommend deletion of 1606.4.f.8.

1608 Alley Lot By-Right Uses Zones A/B/C

1608.1: Alley lot uses. I support allowing residential use of alleys in R-1, R-2, and R-3, not just R-3.

1608.2(c): Residential conditions for alley lots. For residential uses, I believe there should be no limits on R zones, and minimum alley width should be 15 feet, or less than 24 feet. The current 24 foot standard effectively precludes the vast majority of alleys in the District.

1609.1: Alley Lot Special Exception Uses; I believe alley lots in R-3 zones should be afforded residential use by right, not by special exception.

1609.2: Alley lot special exemptions. I believe alley width should be 15 feet, or less than 24 feet, not 24 feet. I understand that fire codes concerns resulted in the 24 foot language, but believe this code is excessive.

Thank you for considering my testimony.
Respectfully,
Leslie Thomas


signature