

FEDERATION OF CITIZENS ASSOCIATIONS OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

Organized 1910, Incorporated 1940

Testimony of Anne Mohnkern Renshaw, President

On Proposed Zoning Changes

Before the District of Columbia Zoning Commission

February 11, 2014

I'M ANNE RENSHAW, PRESIDENT OF THE DC FEDERATION OF CITIZENS ASSOCIATIONS, FORMER CHEVY CHASE ANC CHAIR AND FORMER VICE CHAIR OF THE BOARD OF ZONING ADJUSTMENT.

ON BEHALF OF THE CITIZENS FEDERATION, OUR THANKS TO MEMBERS OF THE ZONING COMMISSION FOR HOLDING THESE WARD-BASED HEARINGS TO GATHER ADDITIONAL PUBLIC COMMENTS ABOUT PROPOSED CHANGES TO DC'S INTRICATE ZONING REGULATIONS

I AM THE FEDERATION'S WIND-UP HITTER THIS EVENING, GIVEN THAT MEMBER ASSOCIATIONS AND FRIENDS OF THE FEDERATION HAVE APPEARED BEFORE YOU TO DEBATE, IN PART, HOW SO-CALLED VISIONARY TRANSFORMATIONS OF THE ZONING REGULATIONS MAY ALSO BE A THREAT TO DC'S NEIGHBORHOODS

TWO YEARS AGO, THE CITIZENS FEDERATION RECOGNIZED THAT THE ZONING REDO WAS GATHERING STEAM, LEAVING BEHIND AN UNKNOWNING PUBLIC GOOD INFORMATION WAS SCARCE RESIDENTS, FOR THE MOST PART, HAD NO CLUE ABOUT HOW CHANGES IN THE ZONING CODE WOULD AFFECT THEIR LIVES AND PROPERTY

IN FEBRUARY 2012, THE CITIZENS FEDERATION HELD THE FIRST OF THREE PUBLIC BRIEFINGS ON OP'S ZONING REWRITE, ASKING "WHETHER CHANGES IN THE ZONING CODE WILL IMPROVE OR ERODE THE CITY'S RESIDENTIAL AREAS." OUR GUESTS WERE OP'S DEPUTY DIRECTOR FOR DEVELOPMENT REVIEW, AS WELL AS ITS ZONING UPDATE MANAGER MEMBERS OF THE ZONING REWRITE TASK FORCE (ALMA GATES, NANCY MACWOOD AND GEORGE CLARK) PROVIDED A FORCEFUL CONTRAST TO OP'S PRESENTATION AUDIENCE CONCERN CENTERED ON THE POSSIBILITY THAT NEIGHBORHOODS COULD BE SIGNIFICANTLY CHANGED IF VARIOUS PROPOSED REGULATIONS (e.g., SIDE YARD, ACCESSORY DWELLINGS, INCREASED DENSITY AND MINIMAL NON-RESIDENTIAL PARKING) TAKE HOLD

IN OCTOBER 2012, THE FEDERATION HELD ITS SECOND AND THIRD CITY-WIDE ZONING REWRITE BRIEFING. ONE ON "TRANSIT CORRIDOR DEVELOPMENT ITS IMPACT ON ABUTTING RESIDENTIAL NEIGHBORHOODS, PARKING, TRAFFIC AND MASS TRANSIT" (WITH D-DOT AND WMATA), FOLLOWED BY A PROGRAM ON THE "DISTRICT'S REZONING REDO: CAN DC BUSINESS AND RESIDENTS (READ "CONSUMERS") BE EQUALLY INVESTED IN DC'S ZONING REWRITE?" (WITH A WELL-READ WASHINGTON POST BUSINESS REPORTER AND THE DIRECTOR OF THE OFFICE OF PLANNING)

WE'RE AT THE POINT, NOW, OF ASKING THE ZONING COMMISSION TO PAUSE AND NOT RUSH TO JUDGMENT ON THE PROPOSED ZONING CHANGES

EVEN IF THE ZONING "LANGUAGE" AND REGULATIONS ARE STREAMLINED, THE INTENT OF THE ZONING REDO SEEMS TO DIMINISH NEIGHBORHOOD PROTECTIONS. HERE'S HOW WE SEE IT. IF THE CITY CAN'T BUILD HIGHER DOWNTOWN, THEN WHY NOT BUILD UP NEIGHBORHOOD AREAS ABUTTING ARTERIALS, AS HAS BEEN PUBLICIZED, TO HOUSE NEWCOMERS AND DOWNSIZERS WHY NOT ENCOURAGE THE BUILDING OF ACCESSORY DWELLINGS UNITS IN ACCOMMODATING BACK YARDS? WHY NOT LESSEN, IF NOT ELIMINATE, NEIGHBORHOOD PARKING REQUIREMENTS BECAUSE THE CITY ADVOCATES METRO AND BIKE TRAVEL.

NEIGHBORHOODS ARE FEELING PRESSURE, SENSING THAT ZONING REGULATIONS, AS CURRENTLY PROPOSED, OFFER MINIMAL PROTECTION THIS IS NOT AN ARGUMENT ABOUT THE DIRECTION AND AMOUNT OF GROWTH, BUT THAT ZONING REGULATIONS SHOULD SUPPORT INDIVIDUAL NEIGHBORHOODS TRYING TO RETAIN THEIR SPECIAL CHARACTER AND DIVERSITY

WHILE THE CITY HAS BECOME MORE VIBRANT AND MODERN, THE CITIZENS FEDERATION IS ALSO CONCERNED THAT NECESSARY INFRASTRUCTURE IMPROVEMENTS CANNOT KEEP STEP WITH ACCELERATED DEVELOPMENT THE CITY SHOULD BE HIRING MORE POLICE AS THERE IS CRIME IN THE NEIGHBORHOODS ADDITIONAL AMBULANCES AND PARAMEDICS ARE NEEDED TO ABSORB THE STRESSES ON THE CITY'S EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICE SYSTEM OUR ROADS ARE IN DISREPAIR, OUR SEWER SYSTEM IS NOT GETTING ANY YOUNGER OUR METRO SYSTEM IS AT CAPACITY, NON RUSH-HOUR BUS SERVICE IS POOR AND TRAFFIC IS A TRIAL DCRA, MOREOVER, IS WOEFULLY SHORT OF INSPECTORS THE FEDERATION COULD SEE THE CRACKS IN THE CITY'S PLANS FOR GROWTH WHEN DC AGENCIES APPEARED BEFORE US TO DISCUSS HOW REVISIONS TO THE CITY'S ZONING REGULATIONS WOULD IMPACT THEIR DEPARTMENTS

IN SUMMARY, THE END RESULT OF THE ZONING REWRITE MUST SHOW A BALANCE BETWEEN NEIGHBORHOOD PRESERVATION VS ACCELERATED DEVELOPMENT AND INCREASED DENSITY. THAT REQUEST IS WHAT WE'RE ASKING THE ZONING COMMISSION TO GUARANTEE AND BE REFLECTED IN ANY CHANGE TO DC'S ZONING REGULATIONS