

Testimony of
Stephanie Guzmán, Student
To the Zoning Committee
Tuesday, February 11th, 2014

Good evening Chairman Hood and members of the Zoning Commission. Thank you for this opportunity to testify in support of the Zoning Regulations Review. My name is Stephanie Guzmán and I am a 12th grader at School Without Walls. I have been a Ward 4 resident for 15 years. I am particularly interested in developing and maintaining affordable housing in historic communities.

As the new Comprehensive Plan states, there is a need for “substantial revision and reorganization – even new zones.” Today, I want to emphasize the need for one new kind of zone in particular: the conservation district. Currently, DC has 56 historic districts but no conservation districts. I have been researching this issue and found that historic neighborhoods have a greater variety of housing options and tend to be mixed-income more often than non-historic neighborhoods. In conservation districts, historic homes and buildings could still be preserved but without the stringent requirements of historic districts that often lead to higher costs. Wards 3 and 4 do not have the concentration of historic buildings as do other areas of the city, making them excellent candidates for conservation districts.

In a report published in 2003, Donovan Rypkema, principal of the D.C.-based firm Place Economics, calls for the creation of conservation districts as a tool to further historic preservation. He notes that conservation districts should be initiated at the neighborhood level by residents in established, primarily residential areas that display a distinctive neighborhood character among other criteria.*

Some areas in Wards 3 and 4 meet the criteria but there is no legislation in place under which neighborhood residents can initiate a conservation district.

I wanted to testify on this point because mixed-income neighborhoods, which most often occur in historic communities – and can be preserved in conservation districts – are integral to sustainable city growth. Rypkema notes “most neighborhoods in American cities are essentially still segregated by income, race, occupation and education. The exception, in study after study, is in local historic districts.”

Historic neighborhoods attract and accommodate a diverse population. This is due to many factors, such as the quality of buildings, neighborhood activists who make efforts to protect their community, a wider variety of housing options, greater initial affordability, and protection from demolition and major changes due to preservation legislation. Economists from Williams College and Brown University conducted a study that found “cultural diversity and tolerance are not by-products but key drivers of economic progress.” I recommend that the Zoning

*Rypkema, Donovan D. *Planning for the Future, Using the Past: The Role of Historic Preservation in Building Tomorrow's Washington, DC*. Rep. District of Columbia Office of Planning, Sept. 2003. Web 4 Feb. 2014.

Commission place a high priority on historic preservation because it enables socioeconomic variety

According to federal guidelines, a historic district is a significant concentration of sites, buildings, structures, or objects united historically, aesthetically, or both. The important distinguishing trait of a conservation district is that it can be small and specialized, encompassing only as many buildings as a neighborhood desires. Buildings in both types of districts benefit from a federal tax credit and local laws facilitating preservation.

I propose to the Zoning Commission that the ability to designate areas as conservation districts – after being requested by its residents – be written in to the ZRR. The zoning regulations for a conservation district could include a formal designation application and process, public input regarding its design, and oversight from a governing body such as the Zoning Commission

The DC Zoning regulations are a key part to our community's wellbeing and must be reviewed with the changing nature of our neighborhoods in mind. Conservation districts are one proposition to consider in order to maintain affordable housing and grapple with the challenges of living in a dynamic city

Thank you.