

Comments of Susan MacKnight
Zoning Commission Case No. 08-06A
Zoning Regulations Review: Subtitle C, Chapter 19 - Vehicle Parking
February 11, 2014

Good evening. My name is Susan MacKnight. My comments tonight target the shortsightedness of the proposal to cut the District's already low minimum parking requirement for residential projects near transit.

I live four blocks from the Friendship Heights Metro station and even closer to Wisconsin Avenue's multiple bus routes. I have a car, just as I did when I was younger and lived literally steps from the Cleveland Park Metro station and Connecticut Avenue bus lines. Why own a car when there are good mass-transit options nearby? One word: convenience — getting to places in the area not accessible by train and/or bus, bringing home heavy or bulky items and going to evening meetings that might run late.

The Office of Planning ignores these realities of city living in pushing a plan that would slash the minimum onsite parking requirement to barely one space for every six units in new apartment and condo buildings close to a public-transportation network, such as the upper Wisconsin Avenue corridor.

To justify this drastic shift, OP cites the fact that more than one-third of District households are car-free. It conveniently skips over the flip side of this statistic — that nearly two-thirds of households do own a vehicle. Bureau of the Census data indicate that, citywide, the vehicle ownership rate has remained constant at roughly 0.9 vehicle per household despite the demographic changes that have accompanied the population gains of recent years. In Friendship Heights the figure is higher: approximately 1.4 vehicles per household, according to data provided to the Zoning Commission by the Friendship Neighborhood Association.

Spillover parking already is a problem for the low-density residential neighborhood adjacent to Friendship Heights' stores, restaurants, offices and subway station. What is going to happen when developers put up apartment or condo buildings with little or no onsite parking in upper Wisconsin Avenue's commercial zone?

Many of these properties no doubt will be upscale buildings marketed to people who are used to having one or more vehicles. They are no more likely than I am to give up their cars for some combination of subway, buses, taxis and car-share services. Even if these new residents are willing to pay to park, there are few public garages or other offsite parking facilities in Friendship Heights. The spillover-parking problem will be magnified, impacting the livability of my neighborhood.

The draft requirement for onsite parking in projects in transit-centric zones clearly is untenable. I urge the Zoning Commission to direct OP to rework its proposal to reflect the actual parking demands generated by apartment and condo developments. At the very least, the result of this process should be retention of the current minimum of one off-street parking space for every two to four units in new residential buildings.

Thank you.

Susan MacKnight
4422 Garrison Street N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20016

Testimony in SUPPORT of Case 08-06A, by
Jessica Zdeb, 1317 Shepherd St NW, Unit D, Washington, DC 20011,
before the DC Zoning Commission
February 11, 2014

My name is Jessica Zdeb, and I live in Ward 4 on the 1300 block of Shepherd Street. I am here tonight to speak in support of the updates to DC's Zoning Code, especially reforms to parking requirements for residential development. I believe that these reforms can help make DC a more environmentally sustainable and affordable city which are two aspects of this city that I value highly.

Like over a third of DC residents, I don't own a car. The myriad transportation options available to me – 50 buses within a half block, 70 buses and bike share in a 5-minute walk, Metrorail in 10 – mean that I can easily make this choice. The carbon footprint of my transportation is tiny and helps in a small way reach DC's goal of making ours the healthiest, greenest and most livable city in the US by 2032. Lowering parking requirements in these areas rich in transportation options can ease the way for more development that lets people go car-free.

I make the choice not to have a car, but for many of my fellow residents, it's not a choice. A car is simply unaffordable. With the high cost of housing here, adding the burden of auto payments is too much. Lowering the requirements for parking can help lower the cost of housing by making developments pencil out more easily. More units on the same amount of land mean lower prices for each one. I want this city to stay diverse, and providing more housing opportunities for all income levels will help with that.

Even though I don't own a car, I do own a parking space. My husband and I are not the only owners in our 8-unit building in that situation. Our neighbor also owns a space, but no car. We rent our spaces to Zipcar. Three other unit owners do not have cars. And yet we know the neighborhood was in an uproar about our building's development because of parking. Five spaces were never going to be enough for eight units even though that's one more than required under current zoning. And yet they are more than enough.

I heard a developer's presentation at my local ANC meeting about how he needed a parking variance for a building nearly within sight of a Metrorail station and next to bus stops. His company proposed to have residents use the under-utilized garage at a nearby building of theirs. It's eminently sensible. And under the new zoning regulations, this kind of parking share agreement will not require an onerous variance process. I'm happy to hear about smart developers like this who will forgo car parking and will add in-unit bike parking.

The current zoning code will not lead to development that supports a green, diverse city, and that's what I want to see. I hope you will bring this long process of the zoning update to a close by supporting these changes which will help make and keep DC the modern, world-class city it's meant to be.