

Testimony of. Irv Sheffey, Community Activist/Ward 7 Resident, before the Zoning Commission of the District of Columbia's Zoning Regulations Review on February 11, 2014

Good evening and thank you for this opportunity to testify before you on your proposed regulations and in particular, the Green Area Ratio, or GAR. To give you a brief bit about myself I am a former staff member of the Sierra Club, serving the District as a Field Organizer for the Club's Environmental Justice and Community Partnerships program. Much of my work in that role in the past seven years revolved round the greening of Ward 7 and 8. And though no longer on staff, I am an environmentalist and community activist residing in Ward 7 and keenly interested in the future of where I live and the District as a whole.

One of the key attractions of living in the District is its open space, trees and people scaled skyline vistas, especially in contrast with my hometown, New York City. As much as I love my former home, I want the District to avoid becoming a place of congestion, concrete and man-made gray canyons. These zoning regulations can make such a difference.

East of the river neighborhoods, with the presence of several national parks, landscaped private homes, tree lined street and land available for potential development, contribute to Ward 7 and 8 being some of the greenest sections of the city. Though I would like to see more development here, thus improving the local economy and bringing more amenities, we need to retain as much of our greenspace as possible while doing so. Development must be done mindfully. Once chopped down, once cleared, once built, once paved those spaces are gone, not to return in my lifetime nor those of generations to come. We must preserve as much of our greenspace and especially our tree canopy, not only for their beauty, but their utility in cleaning our air, capturing stormwater, countering global warming and a myriad of other ecological services. Zoning, is one key element in assuring that planning and development is done in a mindful manner. The intent behind the use of GAR, can be seen as step towards that mindfulness.

I may not be an arborist, but I have examined some of the suggestions voiced by those who are, namely Casey Trees. For full disclosure, I have been a volunteer with them since I returned to DC in the fall of 2005, serving as a Lead Citizen Forester, planting trees all over the city. I want to underscore what they have suggested and liberally

quote the testimony previously presented to this body by Maisie Hughes, Director of Planning at Casey Trees:

We believe the intent for the GAR is to value green elements according to the environmental benefit. The environmental benefits of large canopy trees are exponentially greater than the environmental benefits of trees with smaller canopies. For example, a mature oak tree provides far greater environmental benefits than a mature crape myrtle. Therefore, we believe the GAR should score trees based on their size at maturity (as it does for shrubs). Seattle's "Green Factor" (upon which the GAR was modeled) is widely recognized as the industry standard for environmental regulation. The "Green Factor" also prioritizes trees based on size at maturity.

By simply changing the language in lines B3 and B4 of the GAR Score Card, the District can create a smart regulation that works.

Line B3 of the score card reads "Tree canopy for all new trees 2.5" to 6" in diameter or equivalent- calculated at 50 square feet per tree". We propose replacing this language with:

"Tree canopy for all new trees 40' or less at maturity- calculated at 50 square feet per tree".

Line B4 of the score card reads "Tree canopy for new trees 6" in diameter or larger or equivalent – calculated at 250 square feet per tree". We propose replacing this language with:

"Tree canopy for all new trees greater than 40' at maturity- calculated at 250 square feet per tree".

These suggested changes make plain sense from this layman's point of view and I hope that you will strongly consider them as you finalize regulations.

For any clarification and/or additional information, I can be contacted at the above address, by email at Irv.sheffey@gmail.com or by telephone at (202) 575-1469