

The Committee of 100 on the Federal City



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Ward 1 Residents Reject Zoning Changes

At a Saturday afternoon meeting convened in Columbia Heights by Ward 1 Councilmember Jim Graham, residents from across Ward 1 soundly rejected the rewrite of the city's land-use regulations proposed by the District's Office of Planning. Known as the Zoning Regulation Review (ZRR) and described at the meeting by the Committee of 100 on the Federal City's Chair Nancy MacWood, it would rewrite the city's complex and highly technical zoning code to change the character of the District's residential areas particularly single-family neighborhoods.

The tone of the meeting was set by CM Graham. He pointed out that while the City Council is prohibited from participating in zoning decisions, more time is needed by citizens and elected officials to fully grasp the far-reaching, long-term consequences of OP's proposals. Opposition increased as the C100 and the audience discussed the implications of the ZRR, including how developers and speculators were out-bidding potential residents for what are single-family homes and then carving them up to degrade the historic character of these buildings and neighborhoods.

As described by the C100 panel, the OP recommendations would invite creeping commercialization of residential property, including, taller garages and garage apartments, businesses in garages or accessory structures, multiple home occupations, conversion of housing for institutional uses and corner food markets. While making these changes easier, if not "by-right," the ZRR would dramatically decrease the opportunity for public participation, including by Advisory Neighborhood Commissions, in these zoning and land-use decisions.

A straw poll showed virtually unanimous opposition to the ZRR.

"This has to be stopped until residents have an opportunity to understand how these proposed changes will affect the quality of life for our residents," said Advisory

Commissioner Dotti Wade. Added Commissioner Jack McKay: "This is a profound revision of the regulations according to some unknown and unexplained philosophy."

"We want to thank CM Graham for the opportunity to have a discussion with Ward 1 residents about these proposals and how they would dramatically change Ward 1 neighborhoods," said Chair MacWood. "The councilmember also realizes that the ZRR proposals do not deal with a number of other critical issues that currently threaten neighborhoods, including pop-ups and apartment conversions of single family homes."

MacWood and the C100 panel, Laura Richards, Sue Hemberger and Alma Gates, urged attendance at two important meetings:

- Zoning Commission hearings, particularly the one focused on Wards 1 and 2 on Thursday, February 13, 6 pm, DC Housing Finance Agency, 815 Florida Avenue, NW;
- C100 Mayoral candidates forum, Tuesday, February 25, 6 pm, First Congregational United Church of Christ, 945 G Street, N.W., (Gallery Place or Metro Center Metro).

Attendees pledged to follow-up and make their opposition known to other officials, including other councilmembers and the Mayor.

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