

Testimony by Thomas Conway

1833 Park Rd., NW

Ward 1 and 2 Hearing, 2/26/2014

Key Points

- **Mt Pleasant's Historic District is unique and both needs and deserves a carefully crafted customized zone, not the cookie cutter proposed zoning as residential flats.**
- **The opportunity to expand detached and semi-detached houses from 40% to 60% lot occupancy when they are converted to multi-family use is negatively impacting the community from a historic preservation perspective while also harming neighborhood schools and other institutions by creating a community of short term transients rather than the long term stability of families. Eliminate the lot occupancy bonus for conversions and set lot occupancy maximums by the type of structure and not the internal use. That is, eliminate the increase now allowed for conversions of detached and semi-detached houses to both "flats" and "apartment houses." Only row houses – houses that go from lot line to lot line – should be allowed 60% lot occupancy in our historic district.**
- **Do not reduce the minimum lot size per unit for conversions below the present 900 sf. Conversions should be subject to review as variances and not matter-of-right which prevent any input from the community on impact on neighbors or the zone plan, which is intended to protect single family dwellings.**
- **Establish a moratorium on conversions until the customized zone can be established.**

Testimony

While there are many things in the proposed zoning re-write that are appropriate for a more public transit oriented city with a growing population, my community, Mt Pleasant, will be poorly served if a customized residential zone is not established to protect the Mt. Pleasant Historic District.

Mt Pleasant is a unique neighborhood that has a wide variety of building stock: commercial, institutional and apartment buildings; row houses, many of which are semi-detached; and individual, free standing single family homes, many of which have English basements. In short, the neighborhood already has a density and diversity that is well balanced and contributes to the increasing performance of neighborhood schools, viability of community institutions, and overall neighborhood stability.

The MP Historic District is a unique asset to the City that includes individually listed houses on the National Register of Historic Places that are also recognized as city landmarks. Yet this unique resource is under sustained assault by developers who are exploiting what is derisively known in the community as the "developer conversion bonus". This bonus encourages the conversion of single family houses into multiunit condos by allowing the developer to expand lot occupancy to 60% rather than stay at the

40% maximum allowed for single family houses. Because Mt Pleasant has literally hundreds of houses of all types that sit on large lots, developers are able to routinely outbid families who want to purchase a single family home because, even with the 900 square foot per unit minimum, they can blow out the back or sides and jam in 3, 4, 5 or even more pricey condos and make a financial killing. But their financial killing is relentlessly killing the neighborhood, and the pace has dramatically accelerated.

What made the community historic is being physically defaced, front and back. What has been 30 years of steady progress to stabilize long term family residency with a focus on neighborhood school improvement is being jeopardized by the transient character of pricy starter condo units that cannot house families as they grow.

The proposed zoning for Mt Pleasant will facilitate everything that is rewarding to the bottom line of developers while doing both immediate and long term damage to the character, quality and unique social and economic composition of our community. Further, the proposed zoning for Mount Pleasant is at odds with the objectives of the District's Comprehensive Plan.

What Mt Pleasant deserves from this zoning rewrite is not the proposed cookie cutter Residential Flats zoning, but a **customized residential zone** that reflects and protects the unique assets recognized by the Historic Designation and the well balanced density and stability the neighborhood currently enjoys. Our neighborhood was essentially promised that customization at the Ward 1 presentation by the City Planning Department last year. We want that to see that customized zone in place as soon as possible.

We believe the following criteria should be reflected the in customized zone:

- Eliminate the 60% lot occupancy developer bonus and maintain the 40% lot occupancy maximum for detached and semi-detached houses.
- Maintain the 900 square foot per unit minimum.
- Require any further conversions of single family homes be subject to review as variances and not proceed as matter-of-right projects.
- Institute an immediate moratorium on conversions until such time as the customized zone is established.