

September 8, 2014
Thomas L Hutcheson
3730 Veazey St
Washington, DC 20016

Anthony Hood
Chairman
DC Zoning Commission
One Judiciary Square
441 4th Street NW, Suite 200 South
Washington, DC 20001

Dear Chairman Hood and the Commission:

Good evening Mr. Chairman and Members of the Commission.

In brief, I would like to express my view that Bus Priority Corridors should be retained in the zoning update as a resource that reduces by half the required amount of parking, and that West End's parking requirement should be that of downtown – that is none.

Let me give you some context for my views from the perspective of an economist who has spent his career helping developing countries reform policies in ways that promote growth and reduce poverty. I have pursued this career both while working for the World Bank, for USAID and now as an independent consultant

A basic principle that has always informed my professional work, applicable in the United States perhaps even more than in developing countries, is that economies are complex and urban economies are no less complex for being geographically circumscribed. Because of this complexity it is very difficult for even the best informed policy makers to improve upon the outcomes that individuals acting in their own self-interest. Policy makers ought to have very strong evidence that individuals are acting on incomplete information or are facing perverse incentives before they prohibit people from acting in their own self-interest. Many problems arise when policy makers disregard this principle and attempt to achieve a better-than-market outcome and in the process coming out with a worse than market outcome. Compounding this problem is that even policies that were justified in the past may become counterproductive.

Both these factors apply to DC parking policies. While it is difficult to understand why parking minimums would have been thought necessary even in the 1950's era of "an automobile-dependent city with cheap energy, separated uses, and no Metro," it is even more difficult to justify them in 2012 when almost 40% of households do not own a vehicle. It is becoming well established that policies which prevent higher density development – of which parking minimums are one – make business development more expensive, make housing less affordable, and prevent more people who would like to

work in a high-productivity urban environment and live near urban amenities from doing so. In addition, parking minimums have the effect of artificially encouraging car ownership and encouraging driving in the city with attendant contribution to congestion and air pollution. Parking minimums in effect tax non-users \$15,000 – 50,000 per parking space to subsidize parking space users, something that is both inefficient and a greater burden on low-income people than high income people.

Earlier versions of the proposal seem to have been stronger. I want to express my opposition to removing the “Priority Bus Corridor from the areas within which required parking may be reduced by up to 50% as a matter of right as originally advertised” and support the alternative language that restores the Bus Priority Corridors text as originally setdown on September 9, 2013.” I also oppose the OP proposal to “Establish minimum parking standards in West End (Subtitle C) and in support of “In the Alternative: retain the parking standards as originally setdown on September 9, 2013.”

Nevertheless I strongly support the general thrust of the proposal to relax parking minimums in the District of Colombia. I hope that the proposal, hopefully amended as suggested above, will become at least a small step toward more comprehensive reforms of parking and urban street use — such as smart parking meters with parking fees that adjust to demand in real time and vehicle taxation according to actual use — and, more broadly, to removing barriers to denser development that businesses and residents desire.

Thank you for considering my testimony.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Thomas L. Hutcheson", written over a horizontal line.

Thomas L. Hutcheson