

Written Testimony, Case No. 08-06A
In Support of the Zoning Rewrite Subtitles C and D As Originally Set Down
And in Opposition to Revised OP Proposals

TO: D.C. Zoning Commission

Chairman Hood and members of the Zoning Commission:

My name is Ellen Bass. I am a native Washingtonian and 30-year resident of upper northwest Washington, DC; I live in a single family home with two cars. I submitted written testimony in this proceeding previously (Exhibits 432 and 433) in support of the earlier Office of Planning (OP) zoning rewrite proposals to reduce required off-street parking for buildings in areas close to available transit and to ease restrictions on building accessory apartments. I am submitting this testimony to oppose later OP proposals to cut back on these badly overdue, modest and needed reforms to our outdated zoning code and to support the original OP proposals or the Zoning Commission alternative language.

I am glad that members of this Commission have questioned OP's proposals to cut back on the reforms they originally proposed in these areas, and I want to encourage other members to join them in going back to the earlier rewrite proposals that are more supportive of good urban neighborhoods, good environmental public policy, and affordable housing alternatives.

Parking: OP already cut back its proposal on off-street parking requirements from no parking minimums in transit zones to a mere 50 percent reduction near transit. This was unfortunate, for the reasons given in my previous testimony. Now OP would further erode this reform, which seeks to encourage use of public transit (without prohibiting anyone from driving), by proposing to remove the priority bus corridor from areas in which reduced parking space minimums would apply. I support retaining the bus corridors as part of the area where reduced parking minimums would apply, as the alternative states. It is apparent that buses are going to be increasingly important for public transit, because the expense of building new subways and light rail makes them difficult to expand (as we have seen in the case of the metro Silver Line and proposed purple line in Maryland). It therefore makes sense to include such bus corridors in the transit/parking equation.

Accessory Apartments: The OP revised proposal would go back to requiring residents to incur the inconvenience and expense of getting a special exception for all detached accessory apartments, even where such units merely replace an existing garage, along with other limitations, as OP earlier proposed be allowed as a matter of right. This is contrary to what makes sense in an urban environment where there is a critical shortage of affordable housing, even for modestly affluent people, especially in Ward 3 where many large and expensive houses on generous lots often contain smaller families than in the past.

I stand by my earlier testimony that the original OP proposal will have no materially negative effect on neighborhoods. To the contrary, having some apartments in alleys may well enliven what are now often unattractive, dead, dreary and underused urban spaces. Indeed, the Washington Post recently published an article about how residents are starting to use alleys for activities to improve their neighborhoods ("Once Dreaded, DC Alleys Become Fun, Even Chic," August 27, 2014). As an example of what is unfortunately more common, I attach some photographs of the alley behind my house, between Chesapeake and Cumberland Streets, NW, in the 3600 block. It is now a weed-choked, debris-strewn, fence-enclosed wasteland for garbage pails. None of the garages or driveways on the Chesapeake St. side is used for parking. Some are neglected, for example as depicted in the picture of the garage which is covered in peeling paint and weeds; the entrance is cloaked by two dirty oilcloths held down with rocks. This is hardly an asset to the neighborhood. Is this superior to what is proposed in the original OP submission and in the zoning commission alternative language? I submit that it is not and that the latter should be adopted (including changing the six person aggregate maximum occupancy to a limit only on the number of residents in the accessory apartment).

Respectfully submitted,



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Attachments: 4 photographs







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