

WRITTEN TESTIMONY OF RICHARD B. NASH

IN OPPOSITION TO 'ALTERNATIVE LANGUAGE' PROPOSALS

TO REDUCE OFFSTREET PARKING MINIMUMS AND ALLOW ACCESSORY DWELLING UNITS

1. My name is Richard B. Nash. I reside at 3456 Newark Street, N.W. in Washington, DC 20016. I had planned to testify in person at the zoning hearing originally scheduled for September 9-11, 2014. The Zoning Commission later cancelled those hearing dates, and therefore I submit this written testimony instead.
2. I write in opposition to the so-called original (or "alternative language") Office of Planning (OP) proposals on reducing off-street parking minimums and on accessory dwellings, which the Zoning Commission is considering along with OP's so-called revised proposals. I address each issue in turn.

Reducing Minimum Off-street Parking Requirements

3. Any revision to the Zoning Regulations that would substantially reduce off-street parking regulations for new construction should be deferred in light of the District Department of Transportation's recently released study and recommendations on curbside street parking, the Curbside Management Study, August 29, 2014. Enacting major zoning changes that affect off-street parking without consideration of the findings and recommendations of the Curbside Management Study would put the proverbial cart before the horse and probably exacerbate existing street parking problems. Street parking shortages, as the DDOT Curbside Management Study found, are acute in some areas of the District of Columbia. Among the study's findings and recommendations are the rejection of a "one size fits all approach" to parking, that would treat all neighborhoods and all transit corridors the same. DDOT's other recommendations include exclusion of new development projects from eligibility for DC's Residential Parking Permit program.
4. As the Zoning Commission may be aware, nearby Arlington County (which like the District has urban areas and dense development along major arterials) excludes new projects from its RPP program if those projects contain fewer off-street parking spaces than what its zoning regulations would otherwise allow. Arlington's logic is simple and compelling. First, if the objective is to encourage transit use by residents, then restricting the availability of street parking privileges for new projects that have fewer off-street spaces, will provide a disincentive for automobile ownership. Second, it ensures that developers are not able to offload externalities like parking onto the public (through increasing demand for street parking in already crowded areas). Unfortunately, neither the OP's revised proposal nor the alternative language contains any such restriction.
5. An example in my neighborhood illustrates the problem. A matter of right apartment project at 3333 Wisconsin Avenue, N.W. opened a couple of years ago. Under the existing zoning code, it provided approximately one off-street space for every three units. 3333 Wisconsin faces a

major arterial on which the 30s series of Metro buses provide service. Wisconsin Avenue would be considered an enhanced bus transit corridor under the alternative language proposal. However, when 3333 Wisconsin opened, the building was able to bootstrap all of its units to be eligible to receive RPP stickers because a portion of the property touched a residential side street which had RPP restrictions. (The 3000 block of Wisconsin is not zoned for RPP.) The impact was quick and apparent, as many new vehicles crammed onto nearby blocks adjacent to Wisconsin Avenue once 3333 gained RPP eligibility.

6. From observation, relatively few residents of 3333 Wisconsin appear to use public transportation daily. Most vehicles are not parked on nearby streets during normal daytime hours Monday-Friday but return later in the day, which results street parking again becoming scarce. This is perhaps not surprising, because while the 30s bus service may be considered more frequent than some routes, it is not reliable. (From personal experience, I tried commuting on the 30s bus lines to my former job near the Potomac River, and stopped using the buses and began commuting by private automobile because bus service was not sufficiently reliable.)
7. If the street parking impact of one project built under current matter of right zoning along a “frequent” bus corridor is so material, the impact of reducing off-street parking requirements for new projects would be far greater and adverse.
8. In summary, the Zoning Commission at a minimum should defer any amendment to the zoning regulations that would reduce off-street parking minimums until it has had a full opportunity to review and consider DDOT’s findings and recommendations in the recent curbside management study. The Commission should use the opportunity to hear testimony on the study from DDOT’s experts and consultants. Going forward, there should be no off-street parking minimum reduction for projects that are served only by bus transportation and any reductions for new projects should be coupled with restrictions on RPP eligibility.

Alternative Accessory Dwelling Unit (“Carriage House” Proposal)

9. Although presented in appealing terms such as “carriage house” dwellings and “granny flats”, the alternative language expanding by-right accessory dwelling units goes well beyond carriage houses (of which there are few in the District) and would not be restricted to family members occupying accessory units. Indeed, the accessory structure proposal in the alternative language, which would essentially enable by-right two story structures on property lot lines, could significantly impact the quiet enjoyment of adjacent properties, change the quieter character of single family neighborhoods and exacerbate effects such as traffic and parking because stand-alone accessory dwelling units would be eligible for RPP assuming that the lot has such eligibility. The current system of special exceptions provides property owners the flexibility to add an additional housing unit, yet ensures that such impacts are considered appropriately on a case by case basis. At a minimum, the Zoning Commission should reject the alternative language so that the impact of contemplated changes regulations governing in-house accessory units can be fully considered before any changes are made that would liberalize stand-alone accessory units on the same lot.

10. For these reasons, I respectfully ask that the Zoning Commission reject the alternative language proposals.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'RBN', with a stylized, cursive flourish extending to the right.

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