

CITIZENS ASSOCIATION
of GEORGETOWN

Before the Zoning Commission of the District of Columbia

Comments on Subtitle G, Case No. 08-06A

By the Citizens Association of Georgetown

September 2, 2015

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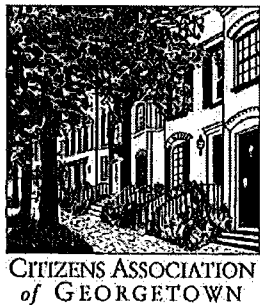
General Counsel

Richard de C. Hinds

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Betsy Cooley

1365 Wisconsin Ave. NW
Suite 200
Washington DC 20007
202.337.7313
Fax: 202.333.1088
cagmail@cagtown.org
www.cagtown.org



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Commercial/Residential Transition Requirements For Georgetown

There is a pressing need in Georgetown for a transition requirement to discourage additions to existing commercial buildings in MU-4 (C-2-A) from being built which adversely affect the light, air and the historic setting of abutting residential building. Commercial buildings in C-2-A can be built as a matter of right up 50' high and only 15' from the rear lot line. Preserving open space is critical to preserving the historic setting and character of the buildings in Georgetown, a DC and National Landmark Historic District. To accomplish that objective a transition provision restricting building height within 30 feet of an abutting residential zoned lot is needed. The Citizens Association of Georgetown which represents over 1200 residents of Georgetown presented testimony to the Commission on this need when it took up the proposed commercial regulations on November 13, 2013. In its testimony CAG noted that it had discussed a proposal identical to that set forth below with the Georgetown Business Association and obtained its support for the proposal as it applied to mixed use buildings. CAG is renewing its request for this transition proposal but believes it should apply to all commercial buildings in in C-2-A (Georgetown).

There has been a recent increase in proposals to build massive, tall additions to the buildings on M Street NW, Prospect Street and Wisconsin Ave in Georgetown that threaten to change the historic streetscape and obliterate the light and air of adjoining residential properties. While all such proposals are subject to design review by the Old Georgetown Board of the Commission of Fine Arts, that fact that such alterations are permitted as a matter of right in Georgetown under existing zoning is a matter of considerable concern. It also leads to considerable uncertainty for commercial and residential property owners as to what is the minimum height and setback that is considered reasonable and appropriate in Georgetown when there is an adjoining residential lot. Because the current regulations affectively ignore that issue it has to been dealt with building by building by the Old Georgetown Board. It would be in the interest of all parties concerned in Georgetown for the Regulations to provide some guidance on that issue.

We therefore propose adding the following transition provision as a new provision applicable only to C-2-A in Georgetown:

Amend Subtitle G §403.1 by adding a new subsection 403.1(b) as follows:

1. For buildings in MU-4 that directly abut a residential lot zoned R-19 or R-20 (Georgetown) the maximum height of the building thirty feet (30') from the lot line of an immediately abutting residential lot shall be twenty-five feet (25'). Height shall be measured from the mid-point of the rear wall of the building.
2. The Board shall have the authority to grant relief by special exception from the above height and set back requirements upon a showing that there are unique conditions present which render the requirements unnecessary or which would present peculiar and exceptional difficulties to or exceptional and undue hardship upon the owner of the property.
3. A commercial lot that is separated from a residential lot by a street or public alley is not subject to this requirement. The FAR of a building subject to this requirement shall be 3.0 (3.5 IZ) for mixed used buildings and 2.0 for all others.

The attached diagram illustrates our proposal.

Discussion

Many existing commercial buildings in Georgetown are built close to the rear lot line. They would not be subject to this transition requirement but any addition to such buildings would have to comply. Most commercial buildings in Georgetown have only two or three stories and are typically the same height (35' or less) as neighboring residential buildings and are setback from the rear lot line 20' or more. Additions to such buildings would be permitted up to 25' in height to the same extent as permitted under existing law (with a setback of 15'). Any higher addition would have to be built with a set back from the rear lot line of at least 30' to prevent higher stories from overshadowing residential neighbors. We believe that this is a reasonable and necessary provision to maintain important historic viewsapes in Georgetown and to prevent residential properties from losing their light, air and historic setting by high additions to commercial buildings on adjoining lots.

Robert P. vom Eigen

John Lever

Richard Hinds

President

Chair, Historic Preservation
& Zoning Committee

General Counsel

**Proposed Buffer Provision for C-2-A Lots
Abutting a Residential Lot in Georgetown**

