

Testimony regarding Subtitle E of the ZRR
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Restaurants and bars but few groceries I live at 11th & V NW, basically on the U Street strip. Yelp.com tells me that there are 161 restaurants and bars within a half mile of my house. Also, I can tell you that in that same range, there are zero supermarkets.

So I love the idea of a corner store, a commercial space that can not be a restaurant or bar and may provide groceries, hardware, or other things I need for daily life.

Unfortunately, in the current draft of the zoning plan, corner stores can not be located in my neighborhood, because they are not allowed within 500 feet of a commercial corridor, and are not allowed in the denser residential R-5-B zones. All parcels in the area are either R-5-B or within 500 feet of the restaurants on U Street, Georgia Ave or 14th Street.

ARTS overlay has proven to be insufficient The U Street area is part of an ARTS overlay which restricts the percent of any given block devoted to bars and restaurants. Nonetheless, the rent for a storefront on U Street still makes it difficult for an affordable grocer to set up there. As evidence, we need only look down U and 14th Streets in this area: all but one market on these streets is specialty or gourmet.

Protectionism is not a valid reason for a regulation Subtitle E, §1106.4(b) requires that a corner store “will not negatively impact the economic viability or vitality” of nearby commercial zones. This rule hints at the zoning laws picking winners: setting rules to make it difficult for legitimate businesses in some areas to compete with legitimate businesses in preferred areas. We should let businesses compete by selling their goods and services in the marketplace, not by sending lawyers to zoning hearings.

Allowing corner stores anywhere in R-3, R-4 and R-5-B solves the problem Corner stores are allowed in moderate-density R-3 and R-4 zones, but not in high-density R-5 zones. There is much overlap between R-5 zones and areas close to commercial zones, which may allow more fine-grained control of where corner stores are zoned. For example, one could set rules allowing corner stores anywhere in R-3, R-4, and R-5-B zones, but allowing them in R-5-A zones only more than 500 feet from commercial zones. This set of rules might make it possible to finally get inexpensive groceries in the mid-city area, while keeping a buffer around commercial districts in those parts of the city where some residents have expressed a desire for such a buffer.

If you are looking for a high concentration of people who like to see foot traffic on their street, who enjoy the feel of a living city and want to see a store on every corner, the best place to look is within 500 feet of an existing commercial zone—exactly the area where corner stores are currently prohibited by the draft zoning regulations. I therefore recommend that corner stores be allowed in R-3, R-4, and R-5-B areas regardless of their proximity to commercial corridors.