Comments for Consideration by the DC Zoning Commission
Submitted for Case # 08 – 06A
Specifically, Draft Proposed Text, Title 11, Subtitle E (Residential Flats)
Hearing Scheduled for Thursday November 7, 2013

November 4, 2013

Sharon and Thomas Conway
1833 Park Road NW
Washington, DC 20010
202 234 7178
Sharon.conway@gmail.com

To Whom It May Concern:

My husband and I have discussed aspects of the proposed zoning overhaul with friends and neighbors, read Title 11, Subtitle E (Residential Flats) and are frustrated by its complexity, internal contradictions, and ultimately, its potential to destroy our Mt. Pleasant neighborhood.

We purchased our home in 1976, began extensive renovations, became active in existing civic organizations, and helped start new ones when necessary; Friends of the Mt. Pleasant Library, Mt. Pleasant Elm Fund, Historic Mount Pleasant, and more. The neighborhood has changed for the better each year, and families we have known for over 30 years are still here, as are many of their children who move back when able. It's what community and neighborhood are all about.

If adopted in its present form, the 'Residential Flat' designation will make retention of single family homes almost impossible, and a unique neighborhood will be lost. Indeed, the neighborhood should never have been zoned R-4 in the mid-1950s, as our building stock comports more closely with definitions of R-3 properties. The current Zoning Commission review provides an opportunity to correctly down zone Mt Pleasant and reinforce retention of single family homes.

Subtitle E would continue the provision that allows 40% lot-occupied single family homes to automatically be expanded to 60% if they become multi-family at the expense of single family units. It gives developers an unfair advantage in purchasing such properties at a higher price than someone wanting to keep it single-family, as the developer can make substantially huge profits creating multiple units. We recently saw this happen at the corner of Monroe and 18th, where an unusually large lot size enabled a developer to outbid any potential single family home buyer and create an eleven unit condominium, including a carriage house.

It's becoming increasingly rare for a single family home owner to outbid a multi-unit developer with the existing conversion ratio. Essentially, developers with easy access to more money than most individuals buying a single family home have the advantage. Property prices are already becoming outrageously inflated, marginalizing the single family home buyer and encouraging developer’s interest in Mt Pleasant. This is destructive to retention of a low density, historic neighborhood.

The proposed rule offers a “20% conversion bonus,” an unwarranted incentive to destroy the remaing intact single family housing stock; it must be removed from consideration. Also, we object to the Office of Planning’s proposal to assign uniform lot occupancy of 60% to all residential structures in row house districts. It undermines the qualities that make Mt Pleasant a historic district. It also diminishes the quality of life by reducing greenery, shade trees, and light, and would increase on street parking. Allowed lot occupancy of 60% would allow additions that would destroy the historic quality of our neighborhood.

Bottom line, it should not be a matter of right to convert single or two-family homes to multi-family dwellings in current R – 4 zones.

Thank you for your consideration of our concerns.

Sincerely,

Sharon Conway

Tom Conway