

Testimony by Robert Ehrmann, Southwest D.C. resident

Before the D.C. Zoning Commission

Re: ZC No. 08-06A, Subtitle C - Chapter 19 - Off-street parking requirements

February 8, 2014

Members of the Commission, thank you for allowing me to speak to you today. I support the completion of the Zoning Update and applaud D.C. for attempting to address some of the planning issues in our city. The status quo is unsustainable and does not reflect the desires of all the people of the District of Columbia. To be clear, I think that the zoning code should embrace the District as an urban center and not codify a hybrid urban/suburban system. Specific policies that I support include: eliminating parking minimums, allowing accessory dwellings, reforming the zoning code to allow for corner stores in residential areas, and simplifying the zoning code so that property owners and residents are all comfortable with the understanding of the law. I'm aware that compromises have already been made on the parking minimums due to the opposition of a vocal portion of residents, and I'm willing to accept that compromise in the interest of implementing the other good work that the Office of Planning has done.

I'd like to take a minute to tell you why I live in D.C. and why I chose to come today, because I think it's important for the members of the commission to hear from my generation of residents when considering how to plan for the future of our city. After all, we're the ones who these changes will affect the most. I think that I exemplify a good number of residents that probably don't have time to dive into the details of the proposed zoning update but nevertheless consider the district a great city that could be improved through better public policy and design.

I have lived in the District on and off since 2002. Like many people in my generation (especially in this area), I choose to live a life as car-free as possible. I grew up in a small rural town which required a 15 minute car ride to the nearest convenience store, and I absolutely

hated the isolation that stemmed from that settlement design. I came to D.C. to go to school, and felt liberated to be able to finally live in a place where I could walk or bike or take mass transportation and not feel at all constrained in my life. After a few years living in other cities, I returned to D.C. with my wife because both of us began working for the federal government. We chose to live in the District because we saw that it had walkable, welcoming neighborhoods.

But we also recognized that the city could be better. We dream of owning property and raising a family here in the district someday, and we'd like to do that in a neighborhood that is affordable and that doesn't assume that every couple owns a car. The current zoning code doesn't allow for this. It assumes that residents will make the same choices that our predecessors made fifty years ago. I support the changes to the zoning code because I think that a change in the parking requirements, accessory dwellings, and the simplification of the code will allow the creation and revitalization of neighborhoods that enable our children to walk to school or the corner store safely. I think that these changes will allow houses and apartments to be built more affordably, to the benefit of all citizens of our city regardless of income. And I believe that these changes will help our city to grow into a city that balances the preservation of our history with the growth of our population.

Thank you again for allowing me to testify today, and I again urge the members of the commission to pass this zoning update without further delay or amendment.