

Zoning Review Hearing Testimony
ZC Case No. 08-06A
By, Colleen Hackett

Ward 1 (Mount Pleasant)

Wed, Feb 26th, 2014

Chairman Hood and Members of the Zoning Review Commission,

My name is ,Colleen Hackett, and I have lived in the Mount Pleasant section of Ward One for 18 years. I'm here to express my concerns that the zoning revisions planned for the Mount Pleasant Historic District will further erode both base of its affordable housing stock and our community's historic character. I have specific concerns relating to lot coverage and condo-conversion of single family home stock, but I also want to focus my comments on one of the biggest challenges we face at this juncture and that is: prior to lifting the lid off of current zoning regulations, the District already has a lack of budgeted enforcement of its existing regulations as well as poor municipal agency coordination required to guide them. We have a problem with enforcement in the District of Columbia , the developers know it , and that gap in enforcement must be closed before we take the lid off the current zoning regulations.

It is my understanding that the municipal power to enact zoning law is predicated on the requirement that any changes being made must, first and foremost, be in the interest of public safety, public health and public welfare. There are many competing interests driving these zoning revisions. One of them is the need for more reasonably priced housing for young people coming into the District. The other is developers' desire to maximally extract as much capital as they possibly can from the land they have purchased through speculation. The OP has expended a lot of effort to relentlessly message that these two desires are *linked* and that we need to liberalize the zoning law so that developers can perform the *public service* of adding more housing stock, and while we are at it, gift to them 1,000 extra square footage by deleting the parking requirement as its been such an obstacle for them for so long.

Take it from someone who has lived in Mt Pleasant for nearly 20 years: easing the way for developers to chop up more of our single family homes (SFH) and build out to the rear of their tree studded lots will not provide more reasonable cost housing for young people. To the contrary, apply RF-1 and the 60% lot occupancy to Mount Pleasant, and you will accelerate the removal of one affordable rental house after another from our neighborhood replacing what was, for example, a large "group house" of 5 NPR interns with two, "luxury " 1200 square feet, one bedroom

condominiums selling for \$600,000 each. That's actually down zoning, and developers who do this gut our historic architecture and clear cut our tree canopy in the process. Then, they sell their condo units, make a killing ,and move on to the next block . Any SFH's remaining, their taxes go up. Ask yourselves: does accelerating this change through zoning revision sound like it was designed to serve the interest of the public welfare ?

The zoning revision of R-4 to RF-1 is inappropriate to the unique character of the Mount Pleasant Historic District. Our large historic homes have been providing affordable housing to Hill Interns, Smithsonian Staff and Wilson Scholars for decades. We have the largest concentration of former Peace Corps Volunteers of any zip code in America. These are the young people who come to work in Washington because they think they can change the world and they are what make this city work. Many have a bright future if they can get a toe hold here, but these bright, young idealistic people who are the lifeblood of our capital have no money. They can afford about \$ 900 a month in rent, not \$650,000 to buy a condo and right now, they can still have a home on the tree lined streets of Mount Pleasant . Don't drive them out of the District just so developers can make a quick buck. The Mount Pleasant community invented density and bike to work. We did it all by ourselves, not as part of some Office of Planning PR campaign, but out of ingenuity, determination and necessity. Mount Pleasant works just like it is. Please don't give the developers any more incentive to destroy what we contribute to the character of this city.

Most importantly, please keep in mind that no zoning revision can serve the public welfare effectively unless the District has budgeted for its full enforcement. If the City Council has not yet passed a budget that includes funding for full enforcement of each and every zoning change provision, please consider the impact of a massive liberalization of the zoning restrictions, with no enforcement to guide it, and no money to police it, on the welfare and safety of the residents of the District of Columbia .

Please consider that the last time the District faced the challenge of absorbing this much growth, the year was 1900 and, at that time, any developer applying for a permit to build was required to deposit a bond to be held until they completed construction and were fully inspected. Any damage the developer caused to the streetscape, the environment or surrounding infrastructure was deducted from their deposit, and the balance was held until any building code violations were remedied. The high standard of construction that characterizes our "historic districts" is not simply a reflection of architectural taste; it is a reflection of building code, and street plan enforcement. The zoning review commission should take this lesson from our past and use it to protect our future.

Another area of concern is maintaining a system of taxation that is equitable and serves the public welfare. Currently, the situation exists that, lacking meaningful tax reform, the accelerated conversion of SFH to 2 unit and 3 unit flats as a "matter of

right” could not only push SFH buyers out of the market, but tax many single family home owners out of their right to “live in” or their ability to bequeath their home to their children. This zoning revision from R-4 to RF-1 has been in “ the works” for over four years, has the OTR been working simultaneously on meaningful tax reform so that , when the zoning code is liberalized, more and more single family home owners are not “taxed out “ of their homes in each successive year. The homestead deduction is not sufficient to deal with the sky rocketing assessment that will ensue on our homes. Unless the City Council is prepared to pass significant tax reform as these zoning changes go into effect, than the public welfare is not protected and there must be a moratorium on these density conversions until there is meaningful tax reform. If you pass these zoning changes and don’t adjust the tax code to protect SFH owners, whose interests are served?

Thank You,
Colleen Hackett