

**Case No. 08-06A**

**Testimony of Jean Stewart on the Draft DC Zoning Regulations**

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on the proposed new zoning regulations now before the DC Zoning Commission. I offer this testimony as a concerned resident in the Ward 1 Adams Morgan neighborhood, where I have lived for 44 years. I appreciate the need to update and revise the outdated zoning regulations for DC, and commend all those in the Office of Planning and others for their hard work on this large and complex draft. Because of the extensiveness of the draft, I also appreciate the Zoning Commission's willingness to give concerned DC residents such as myself additional time to review and offer comments and suggestions. New city-wide zoning regulations will affect the nature of the District of Columbia for decades to come, and it is in the interest of all citizens to help ensure that the city will be livable for individuals, families, those of low and moderate income as well as the affluent, and people of all ethnic backgrounds. In general, I urge that the Zoning Commission take into serious consideration the DC Comprehensive Plan, and to ensure that the new regulations do not inhibit the Plan's vision of diverse and livable communities for all DC residents, including preservation of the character of unique neighborhoods.

Adams Morgan is one of those unique city neighborhoods: it has changed considerably in the 44 years I have been here, and will continue to change. However, it has remained a largely residential neighborhood with easy access to commercial establishments, and an unusually diverse community of people. We have fairly large apartment buildings (I live in one of them), small multi-unit buildings, as well as row houses and stand-alone houses. Many of our commercial establishments are small, locally-owned shops and cafes. Most of the smaller dwellings have yards, shrubs, and trees. However, our quality of life is beginning to erode in the rush to overdevelop everything in sight. I hope that the changes in the zoning regulations will permit retaining the overall character of this attractive, lively, diverse, and livable neighborhood that I love.

Another and unfortunate characteristic of Adams Morgan is the already bad traffic and parking situation. The draft regulations reduce the required parking minimums overall, and of special concern to Adams Morgan, a 50% reduction of the required minimum for areas within specified distances from Metro and bus lines. While I support incentives for able-bodied people to avoid car use in favor of walking, biking, and transit, I do not believe that these new limits take into consideration the driving needs of families with young children, people with disabilities, and older people who may not be able to bike, or to walk nearly a mile to Metro, or, for example, walk to the market and then transport a week's groceries home. Nor do they take into account the massive influx of cars on weekends by night-clubbers that further reduces street parking for residents. I would like to see modifications of the parking minimum rules for Adams Morgan's specific needs, so that overall reductions in minimum parking requirements do not further exacerbate our already congested traffic and very difficult parking situation. I would hope that new parking minimums for our neighborhood would be designed so as not

to discourage residence for families, people with disabilities, and older adults who may not be fully able bodied.

Subtitle F of the draft would replace Adams Morgan's current R-5B and R-5D residential zones with "Apartment" ("A") zones. This would not help us to curtail the current epidemic of ugly and obnoxious pop-ups and other high-density overdevelopment of many of our row houses. Pop-ups not only add too much density, but they take away previously green areas, where soil and plants absorb rainwater instead of adding to wasteful runoff. In the face of these unwelcome changes, there is growing interest in the community in seeking downzoning to one or more of the five new Residential Flat (RF) Zones defined in Subtitle E. This would help preserve the character and the scale of our residential neighborhoods, and prevent too much additional density. However, there are aspects of the RF Zone provisions in the draft that I feel are detrimental to keeping the general character of our neighborhood. One is that they permit the introduction of an unlimited number of commercial establishments into houses and apartment buildings, thus potentially taking away the residential character of the immediate neighborhood with enterprises such as pawnshops, appliance repair shops, carry-outs, and the like. The commercial sector of Adams Morgan already has a sufficient number of business enterprises. Further, the draft does not retain the floor area ratio (FAR) limits for dwellings. The current limit of 1.8 FAR should be retained for all residences. Otherwise, pop-ups and similar overdevelopment would have free rein.

The application of the proposed zoning regulations in Subtitle G to the mixed residential/nonresidential areas (mixed use or M zones) would also cause problems for Adams Morgan, principally by tipping the mixed areas toward becoming predominantly commercial. It would also create massing of buildings, loss of light and air, and more hard and impermeable surfaces that prevent environmentally sound rainwater absorption by soil and plants. This is because the draft regulations eliminate the requirement that no more than 60 to 80 percent of a lot can be occupied, and specify that the 15-foot rear setback is to be measured from the center of public alleys, not the edge. The result is that a building could occupy an entire lot, closing out light and air to residences, adding to alley congestion, and as mentioned, increase the area of impermeable surfaces.

In further support of sustaining the livable and generally attractive quality of our community, I ask that the new regulations change the current requirements for roof structures by reducing the height maximum from 18.5 feet to 10 feet in the A and M zones. This would help to keep roof structures from being obtrusive and unsightly. This effect is even worse when the structure is a pop-up, which is obtrusive to begin with. The draft Subtitle C addresses a related roof structure issue with a formula for setback distances from side walls that is an improvement, and I would ask that it be applied to all row houses in at least the A and M zones.

I urge you to consider these concerns for Adams Morgan in making decisions on the final Zoning Regulations. I further request that you strive to ensure that they support environmentally sound and livable neighborhoods that allow a wide variety of people of various ethnic backgrounds, economic resources, family structures, and physical abilities to live in the District of Columbia.

Respectfully,

S. Jean Stewart

1915 Kalorama Rd., NW #612

Washington, DC 20009