

Oppose Case 14-11

My name is John Ricco. I live in a rental unit at 2620 13th St NW. I'm writing to express my opposition to the proposed downzoning of R-4 neighborhoods under case 14-11.

I have been following this case closely, trying to understand the rationale for downzoning. One argument I have seen is that homeowners in R-4 zones feel their neighborhoods are undergoing what they feel is unacceptable change. I sympathize with this view; a home is an investment, and change can sometimes undermine the stability of that investment. But to block change via downzoning comes at a great cost to non-homeowners and home-owners-to-be: when housing stock growth is restricted, we are putting upward pressure on rents and housing prices. This pushes people and families—disproportionately lower-income residents—out of desirable neighborhoods. **Allowing the incumbent, powerful few to set policies that exclude the many is profoundly anti-democratic and anti-poor.**

Another common argument I have seen is that downzoning will preserve the affordability of single-family rowhomes. This is a confused analysis of how housing markets operate. Former head of the Office of Planning Harriet Tregoning put it best: "I am somewhat puzzled by the proposition that we can increase affordability by decreasing the supply of potential housing units. Restricting the number of units just limits the housing supply in some of the most central and transit- and amenity-supplied neighborhoods of the city." **Prices are determined at the regional level, and any restriction on growth, however local, undermines citywide affordability.**

Finally, for those who oppose new condos on the grounds that new construction will always be luxury units, I submit a thought exercise, taken from the blog *Let's Go LA*:

Why are developers only building markets for the high end of the market? Well, the zoning and permitting requirements make it difficult, time-consuming, and costly to build. Naturally, developers are going to build the most profitable units first, and those are the luxury units. This doesn't show supply and demand is irrelevant, it shows the exact opposite!

As an analogy, imagine if we only allowed 7,500 cars to be built every year. Auto manufacturers would only be making Maybachs and Maseratis, and they'd all be getting bought by the likes of people who own Mittal Steel and the Burj Khalifa. Now imagine if we built 750,000 cars a year. They'd still be unaffordable to most people but the upper classes would be able to buy them. Now imagine if we built 75 million cars a year. The global elite wouldn't buy them all because it would be a terrible investment. New cars would be affordable to a wide range of people, and we'd have a healthy market in used cars – kind of like we do in the real world.

In all, I hope the Zoning Commission will act in the interest of all Washington, DC residents and reject the widespread downzoning under case 14-11.

Sincerely,



John Ricco

ZONING COMMISSION
District of Columbia
CASE NO. 14-11
EXHIBIT NO. 151

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