

January 12, 2015

Secretary
Zoning Commission
Office of Zoning
441 4th Street, NW, Ste 210
Washington, DC 20001

Dear Zoning Commission Secretary:

I am writing to you today to express my strong support for the zoning amendments outline in Case No. 14-11. In fact, I support an immediate moratorium on any existing and future submissions to build multi-unit “pop-up” conversions of single-family homes, particularly row homes until this issue is thoroughly examined and acceptable rules have been reviewed and approved by all stakeholders.

As a long-time resident and homeowner in DC, I am negatively impacted by the problem of pop-ups. Recently, a developer bought a small, single-family row home four doors down from us at 1424 Buchanan Street, NW, and received permits from DCRA to convert it in to three condo units. The old house was completely demolished and the new structure towers some 15-20 feet over both adjoining neighbors. The size, scale, and look of the new building is utterly out of proportion and keeping with the neighborhood architecture. There are many negative impacts of this and other pop-ups here in DC:

Home values – These pop-ups, particularly badly designed ones, are hurting real estate values of adjacent and surrounding homes. Not many people want to live next door to these monstrosities or have to look at them from their back windows.

Density – These pop-up conversions in primarily single-family home neighborhoods are unnecessarily creating density that is neither welcome nor positive. Although increasing density may be acceptable and even a positive development in certain multi-use and underutilized neighborhoods, there is no acceptable rationale for allowing them in established single-family home neighborhoods. I would also like to note that I know of no mandate in DC that says we should or need to increase density.

Parking – These multi-unit conversion pop-ups exponentially increase the number of vehicles in our neighborhoods where parking is already at a premium. The fact that developers say they’ll build parking pads for multiple vehicles behind the house doesn’t help as most households frequently have two cars, in addition to having guests.

Green space – Multi-unit pop-ups ultimately cover over a much greater permeable ground area with concrete which in turn increases water runoff and subsequent pollution.

Quality of life – Pop-ups tower over adjacent neighbors, block sun and light, create unwelcome shade, impact air flow, create heat pockets, etc. Out-of-proportion pop-ups impact neighbors' enjoyment of their home.

These pop-up conversions also put a strain on the aging sewer system. Many of these pop-ups are low-grade construction which negatively impacts the values of neighboring properties. Many of us choose our homes and neighborhoods for a reason. We bought our row home in this neighborhood so that we wouldn't be living near apartments or condo units, among other reasons. We moved from a high density neighborhood to this lower-density neighborhood for that very reason. I don't believe it's unreasonable to expect that our single-family neighborhood wouldn't change into multi-unit dwellings. Many of us choose to buy and live in specific neighborhoods at least in part for aesthetics: We like the overall look and feel of the houses in the neighborhood. Many of these atrocious pop-ups permanently destroy the entire look and feel of a neighborhood. This isn't fair to existing homeowners and there is no need to allow it happen.

There must be some fair and common sense zoning rules put into place to prevent developers from destroying a neighborhood out of greed. Despite their assertions to the contrary, most of these developers do not care about the neighborhood they are working in. They only care about maximizing their investment, pure and simple.

Thank you for your consideration.

Regards,

Greg Phillips
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