

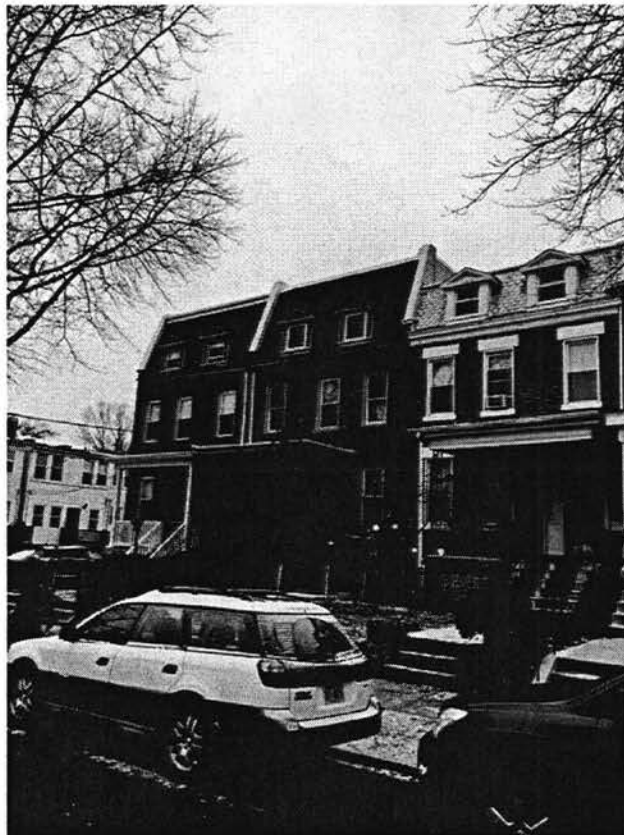
Zoning Commission Case No. 14-11 (Office of Planning – Text Amendments to Chapters 1, 3, and 4, Definitions, Maximum Height and Minimum Lot Dimension Requirements in Residence Zones, and R-4 Zone Use Permissions)

To the Zoning Commission,

This letter is an objection to the following proposed amendments:

- Reduce the matter-of-right height in the R-4 zone from 40 to 35 feet; and
- Eliminating the permitted use or special exception to convert a residential building to an apartment house.

The cause of my objection is that the Office of Planning's recommendation to limit matter-of-right height to 35 feet seems to be in response to the more egregious "pop-up" developments that have gained so much public attention lately (the "middle finger building" being the primary example). Below is a picture of two row houses on Shepherd St NW in the R-4 Zone. The house to the right of the "pop-ups" is approximately 35 feet.



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If the proposed text amendments are accepted, height increase similar to the two end row houses would only be allowed through special exception. Further complicating the zoning process for existing and new home owners will do nothing to address the "pop-up" issue. I would submit that increasing the height of a row house by several feet to allow the conversion of attic space to usable space causes no harm to the neighborhood aesthetics. The Office of Planning wants to allow this only if the resident can prove that the structure height "will not have a substantially adverse effect on the use or enjoyment of any abutting or adjacent dwelling". However, this is already the case in the majority of these minor height increases. Residents generally don't even notice because the building façade is not substantially altered and the increase typically blends in with the existing character of the homes (as is illustrated in the above picture). The proposed text amendments are better suited for larger additions of more than one story. Those types of additions can change the character of the neighborhood and that is the type of development that the Office of Planning should be focused on.

The Office of Planning further proposes to limit the ability of larger row homes to be turned into apartment buildings. One of the primary arguments is that developers are causing the price of row homes to be increased and made unaffordable for single families. The Office of Planning has not provided any factual evidence to support this claim and I do not believe this is accurate. Developers typically purchase row homes that are in serious need of renovation, more than the average home owner can handle, and developers are renovating many more single family homes than row home conversions. The overriding issue is a lack of supply. The Office of Planning's recommendation would not address the supply problem, rather it would exacerbate it and simple economics proves that limiting supply only increases prices.

Aside from the price issue, one of the supporting arguments is that row houses in the R-4 Zone should be maintained for single families to maintain the current composition of the neighborhoods. However, the Office of Planning hasn't provided any analysis as to the current composition of the R-4 neighborhood. Many of the larger row houses are often inhabited by numerous tenants. The owners have effectively segregated the home into multiple apartments. This reality of single family and multi-family homes is already built into many R-4 neighborhoods. For those people that want to live in the R-4 neighborhoods, but cannot afford the price of a single family home, the row house condominium units offer the opportunity to obtain the feel of row home for a fraction of the cost. This is part of the draw for new people into the City. These new tenants help to revitalize neighborhoods through their civic involvement and by the follow-on affect of new shops, grocery stores, and restaurants that benefit the entire community. They also increase the tax base, which allows for better public services. I appreciate the need to keep the character of the old, but this change is more about restricting growth than improving our City.

Thank you,

John Gregg

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John Gregg", with a stylized, looping flourish at the end.