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May 11, 2015

Zoning Commission
Office of Zoning
441 4th St NW, Suite 200-S
Washington, DC 20001

RE: Case No ZC 14-11

Dear Zoning Commissioners:

I am writing to comment on the proposed rule for pop-up developments in R-4 Districts. Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

Height Limitations

I support reducing the height of buildings in R-4 to 35 feet. This should not impact most homes in R-4 as the Office of Planning found that 94.4% of homes in R-4 are 35 feet or less. I do not support a maximum height of 40 feet for new construction of three or more adjoining rowhouses built concurrently. This could entice developers to raze existing rowhouses to construct new buildings. These also should be limited to 35 feet.

Conversions

I strongly disagree with the proposed rule permitting matter-of-right conversions of rowhouses to apartment houses. Under no circumstances should a rowhouse be converted to an apartment building as a matter-of-right. Many adjoining homes have been damaged from these conversions, and damages to neighboring properties will not end if conversions are allowed to continue unabated. Conversions drive up the price of single-family homes because families are competing with developers who have cash and can close with no contingencies. In addition, rowhouse conversions to multifamily reduces the amount of single-family homes available to families and the number of families living in D.C. Matter-of-right conversions of rowhouses should be limited to two-units.

Conditions on Conversions

I support the conditions in sections 330.7 and 330.8 even though I do not support matter-of-right conversions of rowhouses to apartments. The language in sections 330.7(h) and 330.8(d) should be clarified to prevent misinterpretation. The language in section 330.7(h) could suggest the addition could extend 10 feet past the furthest rear wall of any rowhouse. It should be clear that an addition must not extend any more than 10 feet past the rear wall of any adjoining rowhouse. These conditions also must apply to conversions of a rowhouse to a two-unit. Flat conversions by developers is prevalent in R-4 and often include extensive rear additions. This obstructs the light, air and privacy of neighboring rowhouses and is out of character with these neighborhoods. Thus, protection for homeowners is needed for conversions to two-units.

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Effective Date

I implore the Zoning Commission to act quickly on this rulemaking and make the final rule effective immediately. Many District homeowners in rowhouse neighborhoods are plagued by pop-ups and need help now. Pop-ups have been a problem for at least 15 years, and change is overdue. Please make the final rule effective when published and do not grant any exceptions for permit applications that have not been approved. Those applications should be reviewed under the new R-4 zoning rules. Otherwise, D C homeowners will suffer even longer at the hands of opportunistic developers who do not care about D C 's rowhouse communities.

Sincerely,


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SARAH PADRE
Signature