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May 8, 2015

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

RE: Case No. ZC 14-11

Dear Zoning Commissioners.

Please accept my comments on the proposed rule to deal with pop-up developments in R-4 Districts. I commend the Zoning Commission for taking this important step to address concerns raised by District residents.

Matter-of-Right Conversions

I do not believe the proposed rule goes far enough to protect the supply of single-family homes in R-4 zones. Proposed new section 330.7 would permit conversions of existing residential buildings to apartment houses with up to four units as a matter-of-right. The decision to allow matter-of-right conversions of rowhouses in R-4 zones is a mistake. Family households with children need larger housing units with more bedrooms. The District's Comprehensive Plan states that of the city's existing housing stock, only one-third of the units have three bedrooms or more, and 80% of recent new construction has been apartments with fewer bedrooms. The Comprehensive Plan also states that the availability of single-family housing and housing with more rooms are two factors that are positively correlated with retaining family households.

The Comprehensive Plan guides the District's development and provides overall guidance about the city's planning. The Comprehensive Plan states:

Policy H-1.3.1, Housing for Families: Provide a larger number of housing units for families with children by encouraging new and retaining existing single family homes, duplexes, row houses, and three- and four-bedroom apartments.

Action H-1.3.A, Review Residential Zoning Regulations: During the revision of the city's zoning regulations, review the residential zoning regulations, particularly the R-4 (row house) zone. Make necessary changes to preserve row houses as single-family units to conserve the city's inventory of housing for larger households. As noted in the Land Use Element, this should include creating an R-4-A zone for one- and two-family row houses, and another zone for multi-family row house flats.

Matter-of-right conversions of single-family rowhouses to apartment buildings goes against the Comprehensive Plan's goal of retaining single-family homes for families. Matter-of-right conversions in R-4 should be limited to two-units.

ZONING COMMISSION
District of Columbia
ZONING COMMISSION
CASE NO. 14-11
District of Columbia
CASE NO. 14-11
EXHIBIT NO. 331

Limitations on Conversions

Although I don't support matter-of-right conversions to apartment houses, I support the limitations on conversions in section 330.7. These limitations also should apply to conversions to two-unit flats. Many developers convert rowhouses to two-units by adding a floor and large rear additions. These limitations must apply to two-unit conversions to protect adjacent properties from massive rear additions and upper floors that block chimneys and solar panels.

Immediate Effective Date

I urge the Zoning Commission to act quickly on the changes to the zoning rules and to make the final rule effective immediately to protect rowhouse neighborhoods and adjoining properties. The first proposal from the Office of Planning is almost one year old. D.C. residents have been waiting a long time for these changes and should not have to wait any longer.

Respectfully submitted,

Sarah Weber
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Respectfully submitted,

Joelle T. Bowers
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Signature
Joelle T. Bowers

May 10, 2015

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Washington, DC 20001

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Respectfully submitted,

Rachel Mandelbaum

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Rachel.Mandelbaum@gmail.com

May 11, 2015

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Office of Zoning
441 4th St. NW, Suite 200-S
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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.

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,

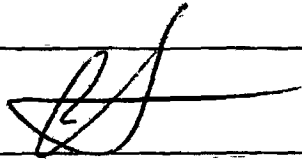


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Sincerely,

Alison Martin
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Alison Martin
Signature