

January 14, 2015 ZC Case #14-11

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Good evening Chairman Hood and Members of the Commission

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My name is Christopher A. Chambers I am a DC native and resident of Ward 1, Parkview within the 1A ANC I am speaking in support of amendments within case number 14-11 that would tighten and clarify restrictions in Sections 330 and 400, on heights and apartment built onto existing single family rowhouses known now as “pop ups,” and oppose any attempt to keep it easy for developers—and for we are not really talking about individual families in reality—to build what are in fact “backdoor apartment buildings” on the site of often 100 year old+ rowhome communities.

We bought into our neighborhood, on Irving St NW because of the stability of single family historic rowhouses and the foundations this condition lays for stable communities, schools and a tax base. We are now surrounded by pop ups—no less than three within eye view and one half block (including one 4-story giant across the alley from us towering into our bathroom and bedroom windows) being constructed. This was neither the intent of the current regulations nor does it feed any concept of common sense use of a neighborhood. For a property owner to decide to place another floor, in compliance with safe building practices and permits, to accommodate a his or her growing family is what we in the community and as voters feel was the intent. Indeed, even a property owner wishing to generate additional income for his/her family—who live in the dwelling—by adding another floor, and/or improving a basement for rental, is something allowed by the present law.

What we have here is a loophole of sorts, exploited by developers, none who live in the community or even the house itself, to create “*back door apartment buildings*” within single family neighborhoods which are giant boxes, with no setback, unsightly, interfering with light and air, and creating “bad density” (ie as one might find in Bangkok or Hong Kong or Rio de Janeiro etc) with associated problems of parking, garbage and recycling burdens. I would be happy to add photographs to this testimony

Finally, the Commission should note several media stories (for example:

http://www.washingtonpost.com/local/a-notorious-piece-of-washington-real-estate-struggles-to-find-buyers/2015/01/03/6402d9e0-8ad2-11e4-9e8d-0c687bc18da4_story.html) exposing the problems associated with the solvency and character of these pop up builders themselves, wherein condo units—trumpeted as “luxury” in one breath then “affordable housing” in another, lay unoccupied for months and thus must be rented out: it is not impossible that they will resort to rental to group home-like organizations (felons, residents with mental illnesses, etc.) , or housing for transient poor families etc just to recoup some income. We should find solutions for such DC residents, but not through back door apartment buildings turned into ostensible housing projects. . on my block.

I urge the Commission to tighten and rationalize these regulations in the amendments presented in case 14-11

Signed Christopher A Chambers 437 Irving St NW 20010

Christopher A. Chambers
1/14/15

ZONING COMMISSION
District of Columbia

CASE NO. 14-11

District of Columbia

EXHIBIT NO. 58

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