

January 15, 2015

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D.C. OFFICE OF ZONING
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Office of Planning and the Zoning Commission
Jerrily R. Kress Memorial Hearing Room
441 4th Street, N W. Suite 220-S
Washington, D.C. 20001

Re: 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)

Dear Zoning Commissioners

I want to start off with support of the recommendations to the height restriction in R4 neighborhoods, especially 400.1, 400.2, and 400.23 through 400.25. As the owner of solar panels on my roof, I fear that a large addition would impact me personally, but I also fear that continued disregard for neighbors could ruin the feel and economic growth of Bloomingdale. I encourage the Zoning office to accept them as suggested.

As mentioned, I live in the Bloomingdale neighborhood and in the 15 years I have lived in the neighborhood I have seen it go from havens for drug use/sale and prostitution riddled with vacant homes to a community that supports families, recreation and homeownership.

However, since the mid-2000s our little neighborhood has seen some large, often unsightly building additions, mostly in the form of "pop-ups." We have witnessed many long-time residents cash-out and move to properties that are better suited for an elderly population only to have developers swoop in after them looking to score a deal by buying low, splitting up, building cheap, and selling high. This tactic resulted in more residents in an crowding area causing an over inflation in the value of homes making it harder for lower (and even moderate) income residents to stay in the neighborhood.

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Although I believe it is important for homeowners to do what they need to do to their homes to accommodate their family and financial needs, I do not like what many "developers" are doing to the quality stock of homes in the neighborhood

Over the past decade vacant properties have been hard to find but any that remained or that were sold in bad shape are now multi-unit dwelling selling as condominiums for inflated dollar amounts. These condos are usually purchased by younger people, who in order to pay the mortgage, must rent out spare bedrooms.

These new residents bring with them many more vehicles parking on the streets, competing with growing families for parking spots. They also are much more inattentive than previous residents. More often allowing trash to accumulate on their property or not clearing up fallen snow. These days I bare witness to this while I slip and slide down icy sidewalks or slippery leaves.

Allowing this pop-up menace to continue would be a step back to mid-1995 when no one took care of their houses, where residents, either renters or boarders, would ignore the debris piling on the front yard. Yes, these homes are now occupied but they are not home to attentive neighbors. And yes, it may add to the tax pool but at the expense of loss of a cohesive neighborhood.

It is not the job of the zoning office, or the city, to police design choices, it seems to the untrained eye that these new pop-ups are not only out of scale with the house next door, but also with the neighborhood as a whole. The materials chosen often work counter to what the neighborhood has long supported. Where brick would have existed, now vinyl siding sits, or stucco, or any other material that keeps the profit margin high. Similarly, there is no regard for aesthetics or seamlessness into the existing design fabric of the early turn-of-the-last century homes.

I am saddened that our little two-block wide neighborhood has suffered an attack to its charm and character by developers. It should be emphasized that quality work and appropriate design can help increase profits just as much as the disregard of it. Developers protect themselves with their LLCs while neighbors have to fend for themselves if the developer/builder is careless or looking to cut costs. This happened on my block in 2004.

My poor neighbor (resident for over four decades) had to sell her home because she could not afford to fix the damage the developer next door caused. She not only had water seep through the party wall but also her home shifted due to the poor underpinning job they performed. The settling didn't happen overnight, it took a few years to see the damage. This was long after that LLC had closed its' accounts.

I hope that you pass the recommendations to height limit and reduce it down to no more than 35 feet. If it were up to me, I would like to the city planning office provide design directions to developers so that they could still make a profit while keeping the neighborhood intact.

Thank you for your time,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Guillermo Saenz', written in a cursive style.

Guillermo Saenz, Homeowner

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