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TO Zoning Commission
SUBJECT Case Number 14-13

As a 40+-year resident of my historic Capitol Hill neighborhood and as a sometime activist during all these years on both zoning and historic preservation matters, I want to express strong opposition to the Office of Planning's proposal to insert a small change in the Height of Buildings Act (HBA), thereby acceding to the demands of developers and others who are motivated by financial profit, but who lack any long-term interest in preserving the quality of life so important to Washington's many and diverse neighborhoods

Earlier proposals by the Office of Planning to raise heights around the city have been soundly rejected by members of the public, the Council, NCPC and Congress. Now, OP has presented a proposal that would increase the height of many buildings with residential, commercial and entertainment structures 20 feet tall – requiring only minimal setbacks and permitting substantial roof coverage. Seeking to reap profits that they thought were "out of reach", developers claim that this matter is urgent.

The proposed text amendment contributes to the cynical conclusion drawn by most of us long-time residents that planning in DC is driven more by a devotion to greater density and by a desire to please developers than to the need to support our diverse communities and neighborhoods. Adherence to the Comprehensive Plan weighs in not-at-all. Before enacting any changes, OP and the Zoning Commission must first conduct a thorough analysis of the proposed change –

- its impact on older building stock
- how/whether incentives for tear-downs might be created
- how impacts of a change might be felt in different corridors & in different parts of the city

Failing such a careful examination, this opportunistic proposal should be rejected outright – thus restoring some sense of confidence that the Zoning Commission is not simply a rubber stamp for initiatives taken by the Office of Planning. We citizen activists want to be reassured that OP follows the guidelines contained in the Comprehensive Plan, requiring thorough analysis of potential unintended consequences of any and welcomes, rather than dismisses an open public process that values the wisdom and will of the public.

Here on Capitol Hill, we will anxiously await final consideration of this ill-considered proposed change.

Respectfully submitted,


Mary R. Wadleigh

Member of the Board

Capitol Hill Restoration Society

ZONING COMMISSION
District of Columbia
CASE NO. 14-13
EXHIBIT NO. 35
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