

I am writing in support of the PUD for the Southeastern University site.

Opponents of this PUD can whine all they want about “contextual disharmony,” but towers + townhouses is exactly the urban pattern that defined Urban Renewal Southwest from the moment ground was broken on Capitol Park. The neighborhood’s own original architects called it “an interlocking pattern of high apartment buildings and town houses,” and notably included 10-story high rises right across from this site. In a neighborhood where high-rise residents make up the vast majority of the 10,000 local residents, 300 signatures means little. Indeed, 300 signatures are outweighed by the 300+ residents and employees who will live and work in the proposed apartment building — a number far fewer than the 2,000+ students, faculty, and staff who were at SEU in its heyday.

Others will plead about the sanctity of the zoning and the comprehensive plan — but those documents were politically defined, merely enshrining existing conditions and a “do-nothing” approach. When the Office of Planning zoned Southwest in OZ case 92-7, after the NCRC was disbanded, everything was zoned for precisely what existed then -- so precisely that a walk down the hall from my apartment goes through *three* different zoning districts. If my building burned to the ground, it could only be rebuilt in exactly the same shape that was planned in the 1960s; even something that rearranged the same density differently on the site would be illegal. Thus, any change to the built environment in Southwest necessarily requires a zoning change, and that’s been true of almost all of the new developments being built.

Other long-standing institutions in the neighborhood — specifically, Greenleaf Gardens, the mainline Protestant churches, and the government facilities in the “auto service center” around the DMV and post office — all got spot upzones through the small area plan. Their sites were redesignated as “medium density” rather than “moderate density,” in order to facilitate the eventual sale of their air rights through redevelopment. Ironically, SEU’s inability to secure an identical upzoning happened not on the merits — it’s much closer to transit and to everyday retail than the “auto service center,” and the church across the street got a density bump — but probably because it didn’t last long enough as an institution to argue its case before OP.

Indeed, the proposal would almost be by-right had it not been for urban renewal. The zoning for this site circa 1936 was “zone B,” which allowed apartments in a 55 tall building covering 70% of the lot. The 2017 proposal for the site is 50 tall, with 75% lot occupancy.

This process has dragged on for far too long. The District needs additional housing to meet its own comprehensive plan, and a building of this size and use is entirely appropriate for this site.

(A fuller version of this testimony can be found [here](#).)

Submitted on 11/19/2017 by:
Payton Chung
560 N St SW, Washington DC 20024