

Cochran, Patricia (DCOZ)

From: Jen <jenpearson7@gmail.com>
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To: DCOZ - ZC Submissions (DCOZ)
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My name is Jen Pearson and I am a resident of ANC 6D02 in Southwest DC. I have lived here for more than two years and have lived in Ward 6 for a total of 5 years. I am writing to submit testimony in opposition to the proposed development at 5 M St SW. I urge the Zoning Commission to reject this proposed development as it is, because this project does not live up to the visions set forth in the Southwest Neighborhood Plan. Instead, this project would derail the plan for Southwest to be an exemplary model of equity and inclusion.

We cannot imagine the meaning of equity or inclusion without understanding the historical context for why these goals are so important. Washington D.C. is a city shaped by the perseverance, courage, ingenuity, and creativity of abolitionists, civil rights leaders, Black artists, Black musicians, Black teachers, Black community leaders, and the people who fought for decades for freedom, housing, education, voting rights, jobs, and basic human rights and dignity. Southwest DC has been a battleground throughout this history—from 1848 when the largest recorded nonviolent attempted escape from slavery embarked from the Southwest DC wharf on The Pearl; to the 1860s-1940s, when Southwest was 70-80% Black and almost entirely working class, and Southwest DC residents built lives in the aftermath of slavery and through Jim Crow segregation despite the difficult living conditions of alley housing; to "urban renewal" in the 1950s when thousands of homes and businesses in Southwest were demolished in the name of progress and residents were offered empty promises of return; to the civil rights and Black power movements of the 1960s and 1970s, the fight for DC Home Rule, the triumph of this campaign in 1973 and the influx of civil rights leaders in DC government, when DC was Chocolate City, self-governed and the first majority Black city in the US. Now Southwest is a battleground fighting for equity and inclusion against gentrification and the displacement of Black residents.

From 2000 to 2017, Southwest's home prices have increased 55% compared to the 33% increase citywide during the same time period, and the white population increased from 24% to 52% while Southwest's Black population has decreased from 67% to 40%. Navy Yard, the neighborhood just across the street from 5 M St SW, went from being [95% Black in 2000 to 24% Black in 2018, while the white population increased from 3% to 68%](#).

Structural racism has shifted and adapted over the centuries in the United States, and in Southwest DC, the oversaturation of market-rate luxury apartments and scarcity of affordable housing play a fundamental role in shaping contemporary racism. The 5 M St SW proposal adds even more fuel to this fire.

I work as a social worker with families who have experienced chronic homelessness, and I have also worked for three years with families and individuals who were homeless or at the precipice of homelessness. I have sat with clients who work low wage jobs and tried to help them find rental housing, and it has been nearly impossible to find affordable market rate housing. There is undeniably not enough affordable housing for the scale of need. From DC residents who live off of disability benefits to those who earn under \$70,000, market rate housing is not affordable. The intention of Inclusionary Zoning is to apportion a small percentage of units in newly developed residential buildings to affordable housing, however it has mostly benefitted moderate income earners renting studio and one-bedroom apartments, who are still paying exorbitantly expensive rents even though the rent is considered "below market." The Family Rehousing and Stabilization program supports families facing homelessness with a short-term rental subsidy in which tenants are expected to pay 60% of their income towards rent in preparation to then take on the full market rent (which likely costs more than 60% of their income). Low income residents in DC are forfeiting over half their incomes so that they can have a safe place to sleep at night, a basic need that the United Nations has deemed a human right in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948 (just as Southwest DC was preparing for the failed experiment of "urban renewal").

As I cross the Fredrick Douglass bridge from where I work in Ward 8 on my daily commutes, I reflect on the heaviness of the stories I hear from clients who face evictions, domestic violence and no way out, deep poverty, disparities in healthcare and nutritious food options, disparities in education, police brutality, chronic stress, and trauma, and I see construction cranes and shiny new luxury apartment buildings, one after the other. Apartments that I could never afford, nor can the clients I work with. It feels like a jarring exemplification of inequality. My gut sinks as I look at the cityscape and see shrinking opportunities and exacerbated income inequality.

Southwest DC does not need more luxury apartments, and we especially do not need residential buildings offering no or minimal affordable housing, like 5 M St SW. This proposal should be rejected until it demonstrates a plan for at least 1/3 of its housing units to be deeply affordable and at least 1/3 to be workforce housing, or "affordable" as defined by Inclusionary Zoning.

The Southwest neighborhood has endured a long and complex history and has been a place where Black DC residents have lived, created, worked, healed, loved, and fought in for generations, through the steadfast tides of structural racism, until the last twenty years in which Black residents have been pushed out in large numbers by gentrification and rising housing costs. Equity and inclusion mean that Southwest DC should be a place where marginalized people can afford to live. The data from the last twenty years demonstrates plain as day that market rate apartments are antithetical to this goal.

Please reject the VNO South Capitol, LLC & Three Lots in Square 649, LLC proposal. It does not live up to goal of equity and inclusion.

Kind regards,

Jen Pearson

201 I St SW

Apt 319

Washington, DC 20024

202-403-1811