

Zoning Case: 20-18

Written Testimony: Coy McKinney

October 23, 2020

Dear Commissioners,

My name is Coy McKinney, I am a high school teacher and have been living in SW since 2009, where I help coordinate the SW Community Garden and advocate with the resident group, SW Action. This written testimony is in opposition to the 1319 S. Capitol project on the grounds that it does not meet the goals of the Southwest Neighborhood Plan (SWNP).

While I appreciate that the applicant worked with neighboring properties, the Southwest Neighborhood Assembly to preserve and restore two townhouses into affordable units, and that the project includes twelve three-bedroom units, a rarity in the area, the greater context in which this project exists clearly illustrates that this project does not meet the requirements of the SWNP, nor a project receiving an Opportunity Zone tax break.

The SWNP specifically states the following:

- “Southwest will remain an exemplary model of equity and inclusion - a welcoming and engaged community that celebrates and retains a mix of races, ages and income levels and enhances well-being for all amidst neighborhood growth and change.
- They [residents] also want new housing developments to offer varied products, especially units sized for families. Development pressures and potential gentrification were specifically considered a threat to the most economically vulnerable residents.
- Southwest’s most defining characteristic is its people. Residents overwhelmingly expressed their desire to maintain the economic and racial diversity that makes the community so strong and vibrant.”¹

Despite the SWNP, Southwest residents have only seen gentrification and displacement. Since 2000, the median income has increased 110%, the median

¹ Southwest Neighborhood Plan, 4.

price of homes has increased 55% to \$417,750, the White population increased from 24% - 52%; the Black population decreased from 67% - 40%; and “most of the new residential buildings have primarily consisted of market rate 1BR units attracting more young professionals.”

To respect the stated aspirations of Southwest residents in how their neighborhood develops, the Zoning Commission should apply the principles of the SWNP to all projects, regardless of if they are subject to inclusionary zoning (IZ). Choosing to only assess projects that are subject to IZ provides a loophole for large swaths of the area to be excluded from the SWNP, and thus, the wishes of the community. It makes sense, then, that the Zoning Commission must apply the principles of the SWNP to all projects.

The application of the SWNP to this project clearly shows that it is not in compliance. Out of the 310 units in this project, only 24 will be “affordable,” amounting to 8% of the total units. 8% is the legal minimum in terms of IZ. Achieving the “minimum,” in any endeavor, is not exemplary. Achieving the minimum in regards to “affordable” housing, during an affordable housing crisis, in an area that has experienced almost unprecedented gentrification and displacement, and is situated within an Opportunity Zone, is unacceptable ethically, and an insult to the Southwest community who advocated for, and deserve much more.

In addition to not meeting the requirements of the SWNP, this project also does not adequately meet the goals of projects receiving tax benefits by being located in an Opportunity Zone (OZ). OZs are federal programs that provide tax incentives for investments in new businesses and commercial projects in low-income communities that are expected to, among other things, increase affordable and workforce housing.² While 24 units is more than zero, I do not believe 8% of the units being affordable, in the midst of an affordable housing crisis, meets the expectations set out by the program (please refer to Exhibit 21 for more on this issue).

² <https://dmped.dc.gov/page/opportunity-zones-washington-dc>

In closing, the Zoning Commission must step-up and address the affordable housing crisis with a response appropriate to the level of the crisis by demanding more affordable units from projects. The idea that unaffordable, market-rate units will solve the affordable housing crisis is not only inaccurate (see Exhibit 19), but is also the opposite of justice. Justice dictates that historically underserved communities should receive priority. Relying on market-rate units to solve the problem caters to the rich and affluent at the expense of those most in need. Moreover, reliance on market-rate units is full of unknowns: How many unaffordable units does it take to create an affordable one? How far will the price drop relying on market-rate units? How long will this take? What are those struggling on the margins supposed to do in the interim? Southwest residents, as well as those who have long sought justice, are relying on the Zoning Commission to do what is needed. What does the Zoning Commission have to lose by imposing more stringent requirements for affordable housing? Who is harmed by the Zoning Commission's refusal to act?

For the aforementioned reasons, I ask that the Zoning Commission require more affordable housing to be included in the project. Specifically, one-third should be market-rate, one-third should be workforce, and one-third should be affordable.

Thank you for your time and consideration.