

# **U STREET LIGHT & A.I.R. (AREA IMPACTED RESIDENTS)**

June 26, 2023

Zoning Case No. 23-02

Good afternoon, Commissioners.

I am Debby Hanrahan, a 58-year Dupont Circle resident of the District of Columbia. It is my pleasure today to represent a volunteer organization: U Street A.I.R. (Area Impacted Residents), that was formed in opposition to the upzoning, from moderate-density MU4 to high-density MU10, of public land proposed in this Case No. 23-02.

Over the last five weekends, I and several other volunteers have been collecting signatures for a petition, which we have presented to you with some 608 signatures at last count, of individuals opposed to this upzoning proposal. The overwhelming percentage of signers live within a few blocks of the proposed upzoning sites, at 17<sup>th</sup> and U and 17<sup>th</sup> and V Streets NW and who, therefore, have the most immediate concerns about the upzoning's effect on their lives. Most other signers live more north into the Adams Morgan community and south into Dupont Circle neighborhood just outside the the blocks surrounding the site, but they too will be permanently impacted by the projected precipitated by the rezoning application before you.

The major concern expressed by the people who walked by our table, was that luxury housing, even with inclusionary zoning, would be the death knell for the limited affordable housing that already & still exists in the 17<sup>th</sup> and U area, and that they feared they would be directly displaced by the effects of such a development. We heard this sentiment expressed by renters and home owners alike, as they quite enthusiastically signed our petition sheets.

Many people were dismayed, as am I, that the city would devote public land (and air rights) to rezone the site for a private project that would increase gentrification manifold in one of

the few neighborhoods in the city that still contains housing that is affordable to people of more modest incomes. This rezoning and subsequent derived project will represent some of the last crushing waves of displacement of working families and residents from Ward One (In the last decade Ward One has lost another 25% of its Black population, for example).

	<b>2010 Black Population</b>	<b>2020 Black Population</b>	<b>% Change</b>
Ward 1	24,794	18,741	-24.4%
Ward 2	10,079	6,864	-31.9%
Ward 3	3,860	6,102	58.1%
Ward 4	44,459	37,315	-16.1%
Ward 5	56,489	51,242	-9.3%
Ward 6	31,842	28,640	-10.1%
Ward 7	67,471	67,375	-0.1%
Ward 8	66,131	69,531	5.1%
Total	305,125	285,810	-6.3%

Source: US Census DC, Ward Level analysis

Strikingly, few of the hundreds of people we talked to were even aware of the Mayor’s plans for this almost two acres of public land that currently provide very valuable fire and police services in the community. There were concerns about what would happen while the existing fire and police stations were relocated during construction – and whether the police station would be coming back at all after completion of the new construction.

And then there is the potential 134-foot high luxury apartment tower, which would dwarf existing structures in the neighborhood. People were fearful that the shadow from the new structure would cast their housing into darkness where now they have sunlight.

The overwhelming majority of the people we talked to, and who signed the petition, were unaware of this proposed upzoning. None of them had heard about it from their Ward One Council Member Brianne Nadeau or any other official source; some had heard about it from neighbors who had only just heard about it recently themselves; others had heard about it from flyers we had distributed and from our door-knocking efforts in the neighborhood.

As you know from the recent record in this case, several people have brought to your attention the fact that they received no official notice of this June 26<sup>th</sup> Zoning Commission hearing, even though they live across the street or within a couple hundred feet from the

large public space. If this isn't a violation of proper Zoning Commission notification rules, it certainly should be. It's not acceptable that some of the people to be most affected by this upzoning are left in the dark by this lack of official notice.

And what about community outreach by DMPED? It's hardly surprising that information is so limited within the affected neighborhood, given that actual public engagement by DMPED has been either largely invisible or virtually nonexistent to date. DMPED's own "Community Outreach Log" (Appendix B of the June OP report) showing "community engagement" on this proposed upzoning, through June 7, showed that DMPED was in frequent communication with three affected ANCs over the previous months – ANCs 1B, 2B and 1C – but their "communication with community residents" was limited to a dozen or so interactions with a half-dozen or so individuals on different occasions, and one community meeting (sought by an impacted tenant early in the year) that attracted about 20 community members.

The three ANCs – at odds with what is clearly community sentiment as expressed to us during our signature-gathering efforts – all endorsed the upzoning proposal. The ANC endorsements show how out of touch most of the ANC commissioners are with the sentiments of their constituents, and how uninterested these majorities are in reflecting these sentiments. In fact, the Chair of ANC 1B went as far as to dismiss the compromise of "split-zoning" or a mixing of zone densities across the two acres of land because she believed "the concept doesn't exist in DC." The ANC's were not only uneducated in their analysis, they were dismissive of their neighbors' concerns. Those SMD Commissioners who voted not to support rezoning did so for the very same reasons so many local neighbors signed our petitions – grossly inappropriate high-density rezoning without any impact studies and understanding of the rezoning's effect on the immediate area (including the dramatic displacement of our first responders).

Fortunately, there are other community organizations – representing both homeowners and tenants -- that do provide a truer picture of the widespread opposition to this upzoning. These organizations include the Dupont Circle Citizens Association (DCCA), the Shaw-Dupont Citizens Alliance, the Dupont East Civic Action Association (DECAA), Empower D.C. and the Coalition for Affordable Housing and Not Luxury Housing – whose member groups

are U Street A.I.R. (Area Impacted Residents), TENAC (Tenants Advocacy Coalition), and DC for Reasonable Development.

Contrary to some assurances by Council Chair Phil Mendelson, Council Member Nadeau and other public officials that citizens will have plenty of opportunities for community discussion and input into official proceedings surrounding this upzoning, I can only say that a lot of us have seen this movie before and it doesn't have a happy ending if we rely on official promises that citizen voices will be truly heard. One the site is zoned completely to MU10, then its a by-right project and all the community leverage to protect neighbors and the future abuse of this limited public land (and air rights) will be gone. We need our land to meet public needs, not corporate greed.

To date, citizen voices are not being heard or even solicited. Two of the three ANCs held their votes to support the upzoning well after 10 p.m., on work nights, at the tail-end of the agenda, when citizen attendance had understandably dwindled because of the late hour. These proceedings were hardly models of openness and public participation, much less vigorous discussion with tough questions asked and, hopefully, answered.

Instead of the mainly luxury apartments contemplated by results of this upzoning application, the hundreds of people our petition-gatherers talked to during our five weekends at 17<sup>th</sup> and U Streets NW found that local residents wanted publicly-owned property to be used for public needs. The do not support turning public land into a cash-cow for the developers of a luxury apartment tower. To live in the District of Columbia for any length of time is to recognize that the housing shortage is for low- and moderate-income units, not market-rate luxury apartments.

Among the questions the residents asked, and discussions we had with them, were on topics such as: "Why luxury housing? Why not a library there? A park? A community center? Housing that is truly affordable for low- and moderate-income people, those earning under \$60,000? What of social housing models? All of which would thus not require a zoning blow-out to achieve our public needs (as with the proposed high-density vastly dedicated to unaffordable luxury housing as proposed on our public land).

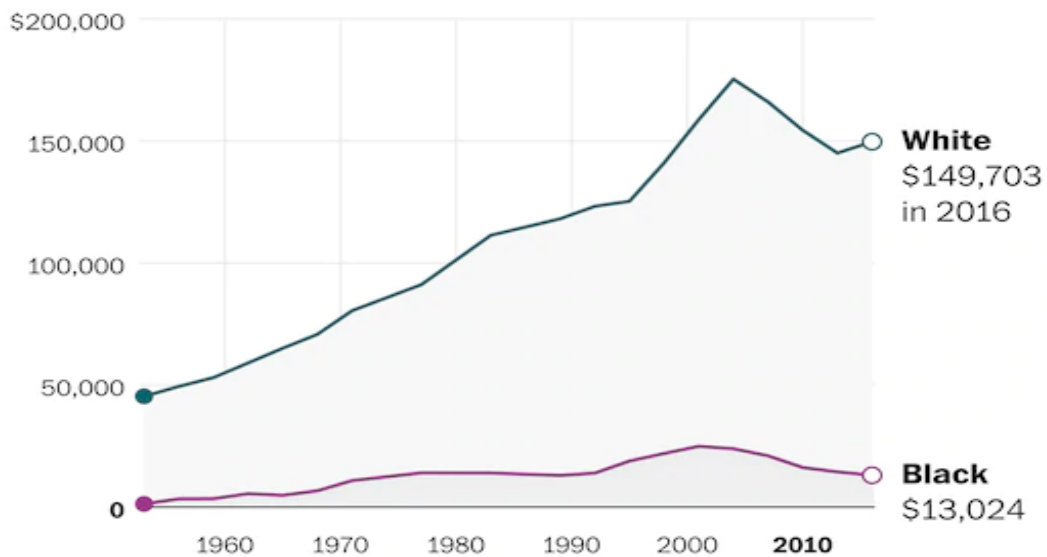
We won't need to build ten stories of unaffordable housing to get some "affordable" housing, we can build a compatible in-scale five-story building consisting of truly affordable housing and include other public amenities without the luxury greed.

Don't we have a pressing need for housing for families in the lower-income brackets (those making the living wage or less for example) that this site wouldn't address under the Mayor's status quo behavior of rezone and giveaway? Why does the Mayor favor developers over the public interest? Why does she want more and more gentrification that will force a lot of us out of this neighborhood?"

Contrary to the trickle-down housing theories of developer-friendly Greater Greater Washington and the Coalition for Smarter Growth, in real life in Washington, D.C. the creation of more luxury housing is not driving down the price of other housing, but rather shrinking the supply of affordable housing while promoting housing for people with the money to afford luxury units.

### White wealth surges; black wealth stagnates

Median household wealth, adjusted for inflation



Source: Historical Survey of Consumer Finances via Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis and University of Bonn economists Moritz Kuhn, Moritz Schularick and Ulrike I. Steins  
THE WASHINGTON POST

Seems the “pro-housing” advocates conveniently forget about race and class when they are cheering “build-more.” For, even the so-called affordable housing in DC (per IZ) won’t be affordable for most Black DC residents due to the historical structurally-racist wealth and income gaps as shown in the chart above.

We must all acknowledge nearly all of the almost 2000 IZ units constructed to date in DC are for single residents (almost no family units have been constructed) making incomes in the 60% to 80% AMI range.

Thus it is logical to conclude that DC’s prime “affordable” housing program is not geared towards serving the most vulnerable DC residents or families and certainly not geared towards helping Black DC residents.

Note: IZ units currently exist only at the 50%, 60%, and 80% MFI levels.

Household Size	Maximum Annual Income					
	30% of MFI	50% of MFI	60% of MFI	80% of MFI	100% of MFI	120% of MFI
1	29,900	49,800	59,750	79,700	99,600	119,500
2	34,150	56,900	68,300	91,050	113,850	136,600
3	38,400	64,050	76,850	102,450	128,050	153,700
4	42,700	71,150	85,400	113,850	142,300	170,750
5	46,950	78,250	93,900	125,200	156,550	187,850
6	51,250	85,400	102,450	136,600	170,750	204,900
7	55,500	92,500	111,000	148,000	185,000	222,000
8	59,750	99,600	119,550	159,400	199,200	239,050

Source: 2021 DCHCD IZ Matrix

DMPED and advocates for the upzoning will no doubt say that a certain number of the units will be under inclusionary zoning (IZ) and, therefore, will be available for some lower-income people. Well, they would say that, wouldn’t they? It’s a tried-and-(un)true justification for the proliferation of luxury market-rate apartment development in various areas of the city.

What are the chances the potential small number of IZ units will go to a lower-income Black family? Not very good.

The annual median household income in D.C. for a Black family is \$54,401, according to the D.C. government's Health Matters website (that's one-third the median income for white households). Of the 372 units produced under IZ in fiscal year 2021, just 95 went to households earning less than \$71,150 (or 50% of the Median Family Income – MFI – formula which determines income limits on IZ housing). This means that someone earning up to \$71,150 a year would qualify for available IZ housing and beat out Black applicants earning far less.

I and our other volunteers wanted to share this extraordinary situation where you have a community about to be adversely affected by a project on centrally-located parcels of public land that most of them knew nothing about until we were out on the streets telling them about it. The petition signers see no merit in welcoming luxury housing in their midst, because with it will come the gentrification that will cause their own displacement from the area.

For these, and many other reasons, I and other volunteers urge this Commission to reject this proposed upzoning. Thank you.

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Testimony authorized and delivered on behalf of:  
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*U Street AIR is an D.C.-based unincorporated non-profit association of residents formed spring 2023 in response to the imminent destruction of our existing public amenities (police & fire) at 1617 U Street, NW. We want meaningful community-driven planning to determine a collective community-vision for this 2-acre public site, we want social housing alternatives deployed here, and we are outright opposed to luxury housing on public land during a deep affordable-housing crisis in this area of D.C.*

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Attachments:

- Community Petition Opposing the Proposed Upzoning in ZC Case No. 22-23, both online signatures and hardcopy.
- Letters List in opposition