

KERRY B. KEMP

1725 17th Street, N.W., #314
Washington, DC 20009
(202) 667-1540

November 18, 2023

DC Zoning Commission
Mr. Anthony Hood, Chair
Mr. Robert Miller, Vice Chair
Mr. Joseph Imamura, Architect of the Capitol Designee Appointee
Ms. Tammy Stidham, National Park Service Designee

**DC Zoning Case 23-02:
Opposition to Rezoning from MU-4 to MU-10
1617 U Street, NW and 1620 V Street, NW**

Dear Zoning Commissioners:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony to the Zoning Commission concerning Zoning Commission Case No. 23-02: Map Amendment from MU-4 to MU-10, 1617 U Street, NW, and 1620 V Street, NW (Square 175, Lots 826 & 827). I am a long-time resident of the Dupont Circle neighborhood who lives on 17th Street in an apartment building within blocks of the site under consideration. I ask that my comments be included in the public record and I also ask that the Secretary sign me up to testify on Monday, November 20th, in opposition to the rezoning application in this case.

OPPOSITION TO UPZONING THE SITE TO MU-10. I strongly oppose upzoning the 1.88-acre publicly owned land at the site in question from MU-4 (low to moderate density mixed-use development) to MU-10 (moderate to high density mixed-use development), because all of the discussion to date has taken place in the complete absence of actual plans and because upzoning to MU-10 would pave the way for a private developer to build an 11- or 12-story, mixed-use “by right” building that that would displace the existing police and fire stations, cause gentrification that would displace existing residents, dwarf the surrounding historic row houses, and have major safety, infrastructure, economic, safety, quality of life, and other impacts on the community that have not even been considered. This would be one of the biggest zoning changes in the history of the area and would be a game changer for our community.

Jane Jacobs, a pioneering urbanist who wrote *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, suggested that density, mixed-use spaces, and community involvement in planning were key to vibrant, diverse, and attractive neighborhoods. It is these very elements, including the mixture of residences, with stores, bars, cafes, green spaces, historic structures, and cultural institutions,

that have made Dupont Circle such a thriving and desirable neighborhood, and we should not lose sight of that fact. I personally would like to see MU-4 zoning at the site in question because it permits moderate mixed-use development that supports walkability, locally serving retail, affordable housing, the police and fire stations, and public transportation options and is also compatible with the existing Strivers' section historic buildings that adjoin the site.

I urge you, at a minimum, to consider split zoning for the 1.88-acre public land at the site, with much lower density zoning (e.g., MU-4) along 17th and V Streets. This type of zoning would be consistent with the DC Comprehensive Plan Generalized Policy Map, which envisions split zoning for the site rather than a singular, high-density zone across the entire site.

NEED FOR COMMUNITY IMPACT STUDIES AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT. As a long-time resident of Dupont Circle and 17th Street NW, I can't fathom how the DC Zoning Commission could even begin to consider supporting this rezoning application without knowing more about the obvious impacts and harms as well as potential solutions to the issues and even the benefits that may affect DC residents—both now and in the future. I ask you to postpone further action until the DC Office of Planning completes safety, environmental, racial equity, economic, and other impact studies and actually plans this site together with directly impacted community residents.

One immediate concern for many residents in the affected community is what impact any future development at the publicly owned site will have on public safety. Providing for public safety is a basic government function. For many years, the community has been served by the Third District Police Station at 1620 V Street, NW, and the Engine 9 Fire & EMS Station at 1629 U Street, NW. Mayor Bowser and the DC Council have recently been struggling to address an increase in violent crime in DC, including the 8 PSAs served by the Third District Police Station. (<https://mpdc.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/mpdc/publication/attachments/Third%20District%20Map%2024x24.pdf>). Is this the time to be closing our police station, even temporarily? And if the Engine 9 Fire & EMS Station is closed, will Engine 1 (on 23rd St. NW) or #4 (on Sherman Ave., NW) have to pick up the slack? How will this affect fire and other emergency response times? Providing for public safety is a basic government function, and people's lives are at stake. If the city government can find millions of dollars for the Dupont deckover project, it can surely find funds to renovate or rebuild our police and fire stations.

NEED FOR A NEW APPROACH TO AFFORDABLE HOUSING. I would like to see the public land at the site in question remain in public hands and be used for public good, not leased to a developer who will build market-rate housing that displaces existing residents. There are many possibilities for the site that might serve the public good—new or improved police and fire facilities, a community meeting space, green space, affordable retail spaces for small business owners, a library, to name a few.

Given DC's urgent affordable housing crisis, especially in the wake of the COVID pandemic, I believe that affordable housing is one of the most important public goods that should be considered for the site. Giving subsidies to developers to build primarily market-rate housing

(which many long-time black DC residents can't afford) in order to get a smaller portion of "affordable housing" units, however, is an approach that seems to have exacerbated DC's affordable housing crisis instead of solving it. DC now has lots of apartments that are affordable to people with higher incomes (and vacant ones at that). What it lacks is a large number of housing units that are affordable to families and people at all income levels. If the goal is to produce housing at scale that is affordable to DC families and residents at a range of income levels—including teachers, emergency responders, and other workers who are vital to the functioning of our city—then we clearly need to try a new approach.

Will Merrifield at the Center for Social Housing and Public Investment has proposed "social housing" as an alternative development model to build self-sustaining and deeply affordable rental housing that can be accessed by everyone (<https://www.socialhousingcenter.org/the-problem>). Social housing is publicly owned, mixed-income housing that would generate deeper affordability by reinvesting rent payments in lowering costs for tenants and establishing more social housing throughout DC. According to Merrifield, Montgomery County, Maryland, is already having some success with social housing near the Shady Grove Metro.

Ward 4 Councilmember Janeese Lewis George and six other DC Councilmembers introduced the Green New Deal for Housing Act to transform the way in which the DC government develops and preserves affordable housing by creating sustainable, climate-neutral social housing (<https://lims.dccouncil.gov/downloads/LIMS/52462/Introduction/B25-0191-Introduction.pdf>). I urge the Mayor and DC City Council to consider designating the land at 1.88-acre public land at 1617 U Street, NW, and 1620 V Street, NW, as a pilot project for social housing.

For the foregoing reasons and many others, I oppose the rezoning application in Case No. 23-02 and ask you do the same. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Regards,

Kerry Kemp