

My name is Andria Chatmon and I am a Housing Organizer at Empower DC. I am testifying in regards to Case No. 23-02: the proposed map amendment to upzone 1617 U St. NW from MU-4 to MU-10. I ask that the Zoning Commission postpone and/or reject this rezoning application.

Firstly, the proposal is misaligned with community engagement requirements articulated in the Zoning Commission's Racial Equity Tool, and in the [Mayor's Office of Racial Equity Meaningful Community Engagement Resource Guide for District Government Agency Personnel of Summer 2022](#). In addition, the proposal, which paves the way for more high-cost luxury housing, is misaligned with the racial equity goals mentioned in the Office of Planning's Comprehensive Plan and The DC Zoning Commission Racial Equity Tool. These goals include creating affordable housing, preventing displacement, and expanding access to opportunities for disadvantaged residents.

The Office of Planning, Deputy Mayor for Planning and Economic Development, DC Councilmembers, and other relevant officials proposing this change failed to conduct meaningful outreach with impacted residents, such as creating flyers, canvassing, and creating language accessible hearing notices. There was also no 1617 U St.-specific meeting to discuss the proposal, explain zoning and planning jargon, or outline implications of these proposed changes. Making such impactful decisions for communities rather than with them is not in alignment with the Zoning Commission's established racial equity strategies.

In addition to this lack of community engagement, the proposal fails to consider Washington, DC's affordable housing crisis that is prompting the systemic displacement of low-income black and brown families. In Ward One, the median family income for black households is [\\$49,148](#). An affordable rent for that income would be up to \$14,744 per year. Yet on U St. current rents for one-bedroom units are [\\$38,304](#) per year-\$23,560 more than what most Ward One black families can afford. At the same time, current census tracts show that the area around U St. is only [3% black](#). The Office of Planning mentions that upzoning the site would lead to more housing opportunities, and while District law regarding public land requires the creation of housing at affordability rates and household income limits that exceed IZ and IZ Plus, such units would still be the minority of the total number of housing units on the site. This would not effectively meet the needs of the majority black and POC low-income households in the District.

I urge the Zoning Commission and Office of Planning to instead consider the use of 1617 U St. for [social housing](#). Social Housing offers deeply affordable housing with essential environmental protections that would allow more low-income residents to stay in the District. DC's lowest income residents would never pay more [than 30% of their income](#), relieving affordability pressures.

In conclusion, I believe the Zoning Commission should postpone and/or reject this map change because the Office of Planning has disregarded steps of meaningful community engagement. Moreover, upzoning the site and facilitating the creation of high-rise luxury units will not address past and present harms of displacement that impact black and brown low-income communities. Finally, I ask that the Zoning Commission, Office of Planning, and District as a whole, strengthen its commitment to the communities it serves and the housing needs of its lowest income residents by considering piloting social housing on the site. Thank you.