



FREEDOM BAPTIST CHURCH

1519 U Street, NW | Washington, DC 20009

Reverend Carlos A. Younger, Pastor

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February 10, 2024

Freedom Baptist Church
1519 U Street, NW
Washington, DC 20009

Dear DC Zoning Commissioners,

We, the congregation of Freedom Baptist Church located at 1519 U St. NW, stand with U St. residents in urging the Zoning Commission to postpone and/or reject the Office of Planning's proposal to upzone 1617 U St. NW from MU-4 to MU-10.

As a predominantly African American Baptist church nearest the site whose presence in the U St. area spans over fifty years, we are concerned about the Office of Planning's failure to consider the 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](#). No meaningful outreach, such as producing flyers, canvassing, social media engagement, and posting hearing notices, was conducted with our church. Were it not for Empower DC, we would not have known about the proposal at all. We received no notice about 1617 U St.-specific meetings to discuss the proposal, explain zoning and planning jargon to community members, and outline the implications of the proposed changes. Making such decisions without community input is not in alignment with the Zoning Commission's racial equity strategies, nor with those established by the Mayor's Office of Racial Equity.

As an active member of the [Progressive National Baptist Convention](#) whose values center on equality, civic engagement, and social justice, we feel the proposal is also misaligned with the racial equity goals listed in the Office of Planning's Comprehensive Plan and The DC Zoning

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ZONING COMMISSION
District of Columbia
CASE NO.23-02
EXHIBIT NO.619

Commission Racial Equity Tool. These goals include creating affordable housing, preventing displacement, and expanding access to opportunities for disadvantaged residents.

The proposal, which paves the way for more high-cost luxury housing, fails to consider DC's affordable housing crisis that is prompting the systemic displacement of low-income black and brown families. The median family income for Ward One black households is [\\$49,148](#). An affordable rent for that income (where housing costs total no more than 30% of the household 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 1617 U St. is only [3% black](#).

We are also concerned with the Office of Planning's failure to analyze the long-term impacts of high-density development on residents and surrounding buildings in an area already challenged with no parking for churches and other civic organizations, including those beyond the immediate area of the site. This includes buildings located in the nearby Strivers Section, and 16th St. historic districts. Many residents are elderly and more vulnerable to the environmental impacts of such development. The buildings of these historic districts are more likely to have structural weak points, increasing their susceptibility to damage¹.

We ask that the Zoning Commission and Office of Planning 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. Units would be located near transit, allowing residents to stay in the city and travel with ease.

We urge the Zoning Commission to honor its established goals of meaningful community engagement, displacement prevention, and racially equitable decision-making by postponing and/or rejecting the Office of Planning's proposal. We implore the Zoning Commission, Office of Planning, and District as a whole, to strengthen its commitment to racial equity, and preserving and expanding affordable housing by considering piloting social housing on the site.

Signed,

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¹ Protecting A Historic Structure during Adjacent Construction. Chad Randl. 2001.

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