

## **Support of Proposed Rulemaking ZC 23-25: Text and Map Amendments to Create Chevy Chase Neighborhood Mixed Use Zones**

### **Comments of the Washington Interfaith Network Ward 3 Congregations Affordable Housing Work Group**

Thank you for the opportunity to submit a statement of support for proposed rules that would change zoning in Chevy Chase, DC (Case 23-25). The Washington Interfaith Network (WIN) Ward 3 Congregations Affordable Housing Work Group is comprised of houses of worship that belong to WIN, a citywide, multi-faith, multi-racial organization focused on building a more just and equitable future for District residents. The lead members of WIN Ward 3's affordable housing work group are Adas Israel, Chevy Chase Presbyterian, National United Methodist, St. Columba's Episcopal, and Temple Sinai. Together, these institutions include 4,800 households, many in Wards 3 and 4.

As our name indicates, we are focused on the need to build more dedicated affordable housing in Ward 3. As noted in Mayor Bowser's [Housing Equity report](#) in 2019, the Rock Creek West planning area (which includes Ward 3 and some of Ward 4) had only 470 of 51,960 dedicated units citywide, less than 1 percent. That report also announced the goal of creating 12,000 new dedicated affordable housing units across the District by 2025, with 1,990 to be located in Rock Creek West.

We are far from reaching this goal. [The most recent data from 2024](#) indicate that only 125 new affordable units are being produced in Rock Creek West, just 10.1 percent of the target, and the smallest amount of the 10 planning areas.

WIN Ward 3, along with our partners Ward3Vision and the Coalition for Smarter Growth, has [proposed](#) the development of 100 units of dedicated affordable housing at the Civic Core site, available to those making between 30 percent and 80 percent of area median income. This project is an important step to addressing the lack of affordable housing and fostering racial equity and economic diversity in Upper Northwest.

**We support the changes previously approved by the Zoning Commission and now being considered as proposed rules for two reasons:**

- **the connection to development of affordable housing, and**
- **consistency with the Comprehensive Plan and [Chevy Chase SAP](#).**

To elaborate: first, while WIN Ward 3 has identified multiple opportunities to build new affordable housing in our neighborhoods, the potential for such housing at the Chevy Chase Civic Core is the one most likely to produce a significant number of units within the next few years. Moreover, the request for proposals issued by the Deputy Mayor for

Planning and Economic Development for the site calls for “maximizing housing” and requires that at least 30 percent of units on public land be affordable.

However, we know that **achieving this goal will require changes to zoning as laid out in the Office of Planning’s set down report and subsequently approved by the Zoning Commission.**

The current zoning for the Civic Core site allows for just 55 feet in height (including penthouse), approximately the height of the current community center. Adding housing to the site while also retaining the green space that community members value can only be realized if the height restrictions are lifted.

It is important to note that in developing its proposal, the Office of Planning (OP) took note of feedback from the Advisory Neighborhood Commission for the affected site (ANC 3/4G) and community members by reducing its initial proposal for total maximum height (including penthouse) from 93.5 feet to 80 feet in the setdown report. This change reflected OP’s willingness to accommodate concerns that increased height limits should not create future buildings that are out of character with surrounding commercial buildings and private residences.

The OP report also substantially increases the minimum floor area ratio, allowing for the density necessary to build multifamily housing. All other key elements of the current zoning (e.g., minimum side and rear yards, setbacks, penthouse height) remain in place, or protect green space (by setting a maximum lot occupancy for nonresidential uses where none now exists).

**Second, the changes clearly carry out the intent and needed policy changes described in the Comprehensive Plan and the Chevy Chase SAP,** both of which were informed by substantial community input and approved by the DC Council. We strongly endorse these goals which directly relate to zoning on both the Civic Core site and the commercial corridor along Connecticut Avenue.

The SAP placed a heavy emphasis on affordable housing—in part to recognize the imperative to address Chevy Chase’s history of deliberate exclusion and displacement of Black Washingtonians. Specifically, the SAP recommended expanding housing options in Chevy Chase to:

*accommodate a greater range of incomes, ages, and racial diversity to advance the District’s housing equity goals, support the commercial main street, and enhance the social and economic well-being of the community.*

The SAP also talks about the need for an urban design that builds on the existing strengths of the area, that is to:

*improve neighborhood connectivity, nourish an active neighborhood-serving main street, create inviting public spaces that are accessible to all, and strengthen this portion of the Connecticut Avenue corridor as a welcoming gateway into the District.*

Although we are primarily concerned about zoning at the Civic Core site, we note that other design-oriented provisions of the proposed changes would retain the character of the current commercial corridor (e.g., those related to facades, parking entrances, materials). Thus it is important to enact changes to both areas.

In short, by following through on the framework of greater density along Connecticut Avenue and specifically at the Civic Core site, zoning changes will permit a more vibrant and inclusive community. We believe that such changes will enhance an area that many of us cherish and are happy to call home.

In sum, the prior action of the Zoning Commission reflects a commitment to development of new affordable housing district wide, and we urge the Commission to follow through with final action on this matter.

Thank you for your consideration of our views.