

Re: Zoning Commission Case Number 24-09

Dear Commissioners,

As you prepare for final consideration of text amendments concerning construction of new university housing on the Wesley Seminary campus, the Washington Interfaith Network (WIN) Ward 3 Affordable Housing Work Group urges you to reconsider the extent of the “broad discretion” envisioned in the proposed rule, in two respects:

1. allowing the Commission to reduce the off-site IZ set-aside requirements below the minimum IZ requirements of the Comprehensive Plan, and
2. allowing the educational institution to make a financial contribution of an amount “deemed sufficient by the Commission”.

We would be thrilled to see Wesley Seminary thrive in its Spring Valley location, and we recognize the complexity of this hybrid zoning situation. At the same time, we do not want a precedent to be set under which privately-built university housing on D.C. campuses may be exempted from the city’s minimum requirements for affordable housing, and with a financial contribution mechanism that is too open-ended to ensure that any payment is equivalent.

We do not believe our support for Wesley (or any other university) as an institution, or Wesley’s long standing financial difficulties, should outweigh the affordable housing requirements outlined in the city’s Comprehensive Plan, and we do not believe the Commission should allow broad discretion to outweigh those principles, either. D.C. is, after all, home to well over a dozen college campuses. What would be the impact if the Wesley exemption is applied to private university housing all over the city?

Rather than compromise these principles—with no guarantee, in any event, that doing so will enable Wesley to remain in Spring Valley for the long term—we urge the Commission to revisit the exemptions offered in the proposed rule, and ensure that Wesley adheres to well-established minimum requirements for housing affordability.

Thank you for your consideration, and for your evident commitment to the wellbeing of our city and the people and institutions that call it home.

Respectfully,

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