

To the Zoning Commission,

Re: In opposition to ZC No. 24-15

We are writing regarding the 901 Monroe Street project proposed for the south side of the 900 block of Monroe Street NE. We are deeply opposed to the current development proposal. We live at 915 Lawrence St NE, Washington, DC 20017, and are part of the "200 footers" group immediately affected by this project.

We bought this house in August of 2024 from a family who had lived here for over 50 years, and it is with their legacy in mind, as well as our own budding roots in this home and neighborhood, that we share our concerns about the 901 Monroe Street project.

We are not opposed to development of the site – we just want to ensure it is the right development for the current and future community. In our 18 years of living in multiple DC neighborhoods, we have seen amazing developments revitalize residential and economic corridors from U St to Shaw, Navy Yard to Southwest, and NoMa to Union Market, all bringing benefits to residents, businesses, and the city alike.

However, the project as proposed is a maximalist pitch, taking all of the liberties while providing none of the benefits associated with the zoning change request. This proposal asks everyone in the area to give up sky and sunlight, deal with a large increase in congestion, and forever removes opportunities for home ownership while failing to provide normal first-floor business space to connect the Monroe St Market to 12th Street.

Provided below is our detailed concerns and suggestions, but the bottom line is that we do not believe this to be an appropriate trade for the city to make as part of the Planned Urban Development (PUD) process. Quite frankly, we think this proposal does a disservice to the District of Columbia by not taking full advantage of what should be on a huge plot catty corner to the Brookland Metro.

### **Concerns & Suggestions**

- **Height** - We oppose the proposal to build a massively taller building than is allowed by the current zoning, and is deeply out of touch with the neighborhood's current infrastructure height & skyline.
  - Per the builder's letter dated September 6, 2024: “The property is currently in the MU-3A and R-2 Zone Districts and the Applicant proposes to pursue a related Zoning Map amendment to the MU-5B Zone district for the Property.” Under the current zoning, the maximum height for MU-3 buildings is 40 feet or 3 stories and the maximum height for R-2 Zone Districts is 40 feet, with MU intended for mixed use and R-2 intended for residential semi-detached dwellings. A zoning change to MU-5 would make the max height 75 feet, drastically changing the neighborhood skyline with consequential effects to both sunlight and airflow of the community.
  - None of the immediately surrounding buildings are that large – and the only ones in the nearby area are part of a much more significant development at Monroe Street

Market that also brought significant additional amenities to the community (restaurants, grocery, retail).

- For us specifically, the development across the street is more than double the height of our home and the small setbacks at the ground and top levels (5', ~6'5") are not even remotely consistent with the surrounding homes. This proposal will result in us losing most of our view of the sky from our front windows.
- If something were built across the street under current zoning (R-2), it would be a 40' max building set back from the street a considerable distance, which would have a drastically different impact on the light that reaches our home. Thankfully, this building is to the north of us, so it isn't expected to impact our solar panels – but that could be a concern for other homes in the immediate vicinity.

*SUGGESTIONS:*

- *Reduce height by two floors (~40 feet or 4 stories vs current 6 stories planned) consistent with current zoning.*
- *Adjust the portions of the project adjacent to the 10th and Lawrence Street residences have significant setbacks and/or reduced height to mitigate adverse impacts on current neighborhood homeowners.*

- Alley Ingress & Egress / Traffic / Parking - We oppose plans to have the sole ingress/egress for all vehicle traffic constructed in the tiny alley across from Lawrence Street.
  - This small alley as the planned building ingress/egress route is directly across from our house (915 Lawrence St NE). Even if widened as proposed, this will still be problematic as Lawrence is already too narrow to support two-way traffic when cars are parked on both sides – and particularly challenging for the large vehicles that need access (garbage trucks, deliveries). This incurs a real risk of damage to any vehicle parked in front of our home.
  - Lawrence, 9<sup>th</sup>, and 10<sup>th</sup> all small streets and Monroe can be congested. These appear insufficient for the volume of traffic and size of vehicles anyone would reasonably expect the several hundred residents of the proposed development to generate. It is unrealistic for the city to expect 75% of a building's occupants to not generate vehicle traffic (owned, rented or services like Uber or GrubHub).
  - The proposal includes no other adjustments to accommodate such a large increase in population density while decreasing the resident to parking ratio – 54 spaces for 232 units (i.e., 23%, or less than half of the 50% ratio for R-2). Further, widening the alley will reduce the available on-street parking, as will any adjustments that must be made to allow for the turning radius of larger vehicles.
  - We are concerned that the overflow of vehicles will be unmanageable and dangerous traffic flow in the neighborhood, which includes both single family homes and schools - with a large number of families and children walking, bicycling and playing. This skyrocket in traffic on streets not designed for it will increase accidents (traffic and pedestrian).

*SUGGESTIONS:*

- *Add a drive-through or other purposefully planned traffic flow for Uber, package/ food deliveries, or other similar traffic directly on Monroe Street.*
- *Utilize instead the existing curb cut on Monroe Street that could be used for all traffic entering and leaving the building, not unlike the parking that exists between Luke C.*

- Moore High School and St. Anthony's, which is only a block away and has an entrance off Monroe Street.*
- *Less ideal, but also an option, is to build a new ingress/egress on 9<sup>th</sup> Street during the construction project, which currently has government, business, and residential on its block, and would create an easier and quicker traffic route via a stoplight already in place to the main street of Monroe.*
  - *Additionally, if the larger 200+ unit goes forward, the project should have to build more expansive first floor or underground parking as most apartment buildings in DC traditionally do to alleviate all the new coming street parking on already small roads.*
- **Mixed Use** - We oppose the rezoning for a proposal that fails to meet the intent of “mixed use” by not providing any non-residential spaces.
    - Again, per the builder's letter dated September 6, 2024: “The property is currently in the MU-3A and R-2 Zone Districts and the Applicant proposes to pursue a related Zoning Map amendment to the MU-5B Zone district for the Property.” Both the current MU-3A and the requested change to MU-5B are "mixed use" zoning, but this development plan is for residential use only. MU-5 Zoning Districts are intended to: Permit medium-density, compact mixed-use development with an emphasis on residential use; provide facilities for shopping and business needs, housing, and mixed-uses for large segments of the District of Columbia outside of the central core; and be located on arterial streets, in uptown and regional centers, and at rapid transit stops. Per the development team, there will be no commercial portion to this project, which calls into question the need for a change to MU-5B Zoning being asked purely to raise the height to 75 feet allowance.
    - If the additional population density of MU-5 is truly insufficient to support the commercial elements in a mixed-use space, then it should be limited to current zoning or have the PUD use an appropriate residential zoning with associated construction limits. RA-1, which is zoned on the other side of the tracks, is limited to 40 ft. which is consistent with the surrounding housing. RA-2, which is a moderate density apartment zone (similar to the moderate density MU-5), has a maximum height of 50 ft, which would be much more consistent with the surrounding neighborhood's limit of 40 ft. We do not think it is appropriate to allow the developer the additional height if they are not providing the first-floor retail, restaurants, or other benefits to the wider community typical to such developments or buildings with similar size.
    - While the development team says they do not want mix use due to "supporting businesses on the other side of the bridge" this is an empty and preposterous response. Small amenity spaces (e.g., retail, restaurant, food hall) or small public spaces (ex: dog park) incorporated into the ground layer of the structure would only entice new residents to the proposed building while enhancing the current residents living and property values. Additionally, all buildings on the other side of the Monroe bridge that are MU-5 zoned have the ground floor as retail, with the above 4ish floors being residential or office areas. Having the ground floor be retail and/or public space will align with the current Brookland Monroe strip look and feel on the west side of the bridge, while also creating a new continuous prosperous foot traffic connection from the west side of the bridge to the east side of the bridge to the businesses already

established but currently underappreciated on 12th St, creating a stronger multi-block economic corridor for the whole neighborhood.

**SUGGESTIONS:**

- *Consider this development as RA-1 or RA-2 and require construction to be consistent with those zoning standards.*
- *Alternatively, allow the MU-5 zoning but limit building height to be consistent with the usage – e.g., any portion of the development that includes ground floor retail/business/restaurant space consistent with the “mixed use” definition could be 75 ft, while residential-only portions would be limited to 50 ft (and therefore consistent with existing structures by being within 10 ft / 1 story). Allowances could also be made above accessory spaces/uses like parking, lobby, etc., if adjacent to the commercial spaces.*

- **Rental** - We are opposed to an all-rental usage of the large lot.
  - Research has shown that home ownership not only creates personal wealth, but is also critical for its ability to strengthen neighborhoods, communities, and cities. Homeowners tend to be more involved in their communities through volunteer work and other social engagements. Homeownership also positively impacts public health, with homeowners generally experiencing better physical and mental health compared to renters. In addition, owning a home leads to greater stability in neighborhoods, with reduced crime rates and an increased sense of safety and pride. Finally, property taxes paid by homeowners fund local services like schools, roads, and other essential infrastructure, directly benefiting the community and city.
  - With prices for home ownership rising to astronomical amounts, it is more important than ever to build structures for first time home buyers. Per this [report](#) based on Census Bureau information: (1) DC homeownership rate was 40.2% in 2023, meaning about 2 in 5 households owned their home while the remainder rented; (2) DC's homeownership rate in 2023 was 25.7 percentage points lower than the broader US, and when compared with other metro areas in 2022, DC ranked below the average rate of 67.2% coming in at 63.9%. It is critical that DC have not only more affordable housing, but more affordable homeownership housing.
  - Speaking from personal experience, we started our DC homeownership by buying a condo, which directly led to us building enough equity and savings over ten years to purchase a single-family home this past summer. Our story is not an anomaly in an expensive housing city like DC, but a perpetual trend and required need.

**SUGGESTIONS:**

- *Convert the building to condo units.*
- *Set aside a portion of the lot for small “first time buyer starter” row homes.*
- *Divide the huge lot into two sections with half for a rental building and the other half for homeownership condo units or small homes.*

For all these reasons, we oppose the current building proposal as written and urge the Zoning Commission and the project owners to explore alternatives that prioritize community benefits and compatibility with the neighborhood's character.

If it isn't economically feasible for the additional rental residents to support additional businesses, then perhaps it is best for development plans to stay within the current zoning restrictions or use appropriate Residential Apartment zoning rules – both of which keep the development more consistent with the surrounding neighborhood. Further, it is unrealistic to not plan for the additional traffic. Perhaps the large-scale development or adjustment to zoning should be limited to the area nearest the Metro and the remainder of the area – that is immediately adjacent to single-family homes – should continue to be restricted to MU-3 or R-2.

Development should align with the needs and values of the community it aims to serve, rather than disrupt and diminish them.

Respectfully,  
Alta Beals and Paul Miller  
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