

Seth M. Guggenheim

2801 New Mexico Avenue, NW
Apartment 518
Washington, DC 20007

To: District of Columbia Zoning Commission Via Email Only to: zcsubmissions@dc.gov

Re: Written Testimony for Case No. 24-16, Grace Reformed Church

Dear Commission Members:

I am aware that the Commission has under consideration an application that the zoning which controls the use of the Grace Reformed Church property be amended to permit “mixed use” of the Church property to allow for commercial development. I have read online at <https://www.citizenportal.ai/articles/2627502/Commission-consider-rezoning-historic-Grace-Reformed-Church-for-mixed-use-development> that the proposal before you as of your March 13, 2025, meeting “aims to facilitate adaptive reuse of the church, potentially transforming it into a vibrant eating and drinking establishment, [and is] a concept that has garnered support from several commissioners.”

While at first blush such a proposal has appeal, I question the wisdom of such an “adaptive reuse” of the church. I consider that terminology a benign euphemism for “partial destruction and alteration” of an historic landmark. No one questions that the City has an interest in augmenting its tax revenues and promoting commercial uses for now-dormant property. The facts are that 1) our City already abounds in eateries and bars at locations throughout the City, to include areas near the Church; and 2) once even partially demolished, the historic Grace Reformed Church will never again exist in the form it is today.

My respectful suggestion is that the present proposal be either rejected or tabled to allow interested parties, possibly to include the DC government itself, to have time to develop plans to revitalize the Church so that it may once again be used for worship and/or as a venue for the public to visit and enjoy. The pastoral and serene character of churches, synagogues, temples, and mosques, when open to members of the public of any or no religious denomination, provide oases from the hustle and bustle and sometimes jarring features of urban existence.

I urge you to weigh the long-term benefit of preserving the historic, and historically important, Grace Reformed Church against the present lure offered by those with commercial interests in its partial destruction.

Sincerely,

Seth M. Guggenheim