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September 14, 2025

Kia Chatmon

303 42nd Street, NE

Washington, DC 20019

Written Testimony to the Zoning Commission for the District of Columbia

Regarding Case No. 25-01

To Members of the Commission:

I write this letter as a longtime member of Ward 7, neighbor of Ward Memorial AME Church and proponent of affordable housing. With these characteristics in mind, this letter does not come from a NIMBY perspective, but as someone who understands the mission/vision of what the church wants to accomplish through this map amendment but cannot wholeheartedly agree with adding a building to this block that goes as high as 50 feet.

My property sits across the street from the church's former child development center. Reading the church's application, I offer the following thoughts on why I do not believe this amendment should be approved:

**1. Statement from the Application: Neighborhood Enhancement Area:** Neighborhood Enhancement Areas are neighborhoods with substantial amounts of vacant and underutilized land.

Lot 74 has been vacant for more than eight years and Lot 852 is underutilized by the existing fellowship hall. The Property offers an excellent opportunity for new and increased housing due to its proximity to public transit and Benning Road. The RA-2 zone allows for increased housing in a manner that is sensitive to the lower-density neighborhoods to the east.

**For the Commission to Consider:** The current buildings are no more than 2 stories tall. All other housing along both 42nd Street and the adjacent streets – Clay and Brooks – are the same. I do not believe a building with four additional stories (as illustrated in their Hope Village flyer I received from a neighbor) “is sensitive to the lower-density” characteristic of the neighborhood.

**2. Statement from the Application: Land Use Element**

The Comprehensive Plan's Land Use Element “lays out the policies through which growth and change can occur,” and, as such, “should be given greater weight than other elements.” *Id.* § 300.3. The element describes the range of considerations involved in accommodating an array of land uses within Washington, D.C. along with integrating and balancing competing policies in the other District Elements.

Policy LU-1.4.4: Affordable Rental and For-Sale Multi-family Housing Near Metrorail Stations

**For the Commission to Consider:** Another senior-focused building, of a similar size, was recently completed steps from the Benning Road Metro Station. While similar in size, this building: 1) sits at the end of the block and not in the middle of a block with lower rise structures on either side, as this building would, and 2) it is closer to one of the Ward's commercial corridors, Benning Road, as well as across from another affordable housing building of a similar size (built by So Others Might Eat). In my opinion, these buildings are less disruptive than this, which would be among lower rise structures and across from a national park site – Ft. Mahan Park.

**3. Statement from the Application: Policy LU-2.1.1: Variety of Neighborhood Types**

Maintain a variety of neighborhoods, ranging from low-density to high density. The positive elements that create the identity and design character of each neighborhood should be preserved and enhanced while encouraging the identification of appropriate sites for new development and/or adaptive reuse to help accommodate population growth and advance affordability, racial equity, and opportunity.

**For the Commission to Consider:** As noted in item #2, I do not believe that adding a structure of such height in the middle of the block, allows “the identity and design character of each neighborhood...[to] be preserved and enhanced.”

**4. Statement from the Application: Policy LU-2.1.3: Conserving, Enhancing, and Revitalizing Neighborhoods**

Recognize the importance of balancing goals to increase the housing supply and expand neighborhood commerce with parallel goals to protect neighborhood character, preserve historic resources, and restore the environment. The overarching goal to “create ~~su~~ ~~zoning commission~~ in all

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parts of the city requires an emphasis on conservation in some neighborhoods and revitalization in others.

**For the Commission to Consider:** There are senior housing options in the general vicinity. The aforementioned building near the metro station, Triangle View and another apartment building on Minnesota Avenue, not too far away. In addition, the church stated in its application that "Lot 74 has been vacant for more than eight years and Lot 852 is underutilized by the existing fellowship hall." Could the church consider building a smaller amount of housing on these lots, under the current designation, keeping in line with the neighborhood's scale?

**5. Statement from the Application:** Policy LU-2.1.5: Support Low-Density Neighborhoods

Support and maintain the District's established low-density neighborhoods and related low-density zoning. Carefully manage the development of vacant land and alterations to existing structures to be compatible with the general design character and scale of the existing neighborhood and preserve civic and open space.

**For the Commission to Consider:** Perhaps what is stated in item #4 above, is more applicable here – the church has buildings. Could these buildings; which are currently vacant, under-utilized and compatible with the general design and character of the neighborhood; be renovated/revitalized to provide affordable housing options? Could additional housing units be added while keeping with the R-1 designation?

**6. Statement from the Application:** Housing Element

The Housing Element "describes the importance of housing to neighborhood quality in the District, and the importance of providing housing opportunities for all segments of the population throughout the city." *Id.* § 500.1. "The overarching goal for housing is to provide a safe, decent, healthy, and affordable housing supply for current and future residents in all of Washington, DC's neighborhoods by maintaining and developing housing for all incomes and household types. The overall goal for the District of Columbia is that a minimum of one third of all housing produced should be affordable to lower-income households. The short-term goal is to produce 36,000 residential units, 12,000 of which are affordable, between 2019 and 2025." *Id.* § 501.1.

The Map Amendment furthers the following policies in the Housing Element:

**Policy H-1.1.3: Balanced Growth**

Strongly encourage the development of new housing on surplus, vacant and underutilized land in all parts of the city. Ensure that a sufficient supply of land is planned and zoned to enable the city to meet its long-term housing needs, including the need for low- and moderate-density single family homes as well as the need for higher-density housing.

**For the Commission to Consider:** Does this project address this need? The land is not vacant, and while it may be under-utilized, is building such a structure on a low density street, across from national park land on this particular block in Ward 7 a remedy?

**7. Statement from the Application:** Policy H-4.3.2: Housing Choice for Older Adults

Provide a wide variety of affordable housing choices for the District's older adults that enable them to age in their neighborhoods either by supporting their ability to remain in their homes or by providing new opportunities within multi-unit buildings that include Universal Design and intergenerational options. Take into account the income range and health care needs of this population. Recognize the coming growth in the older adult population so that the production and rehabilitation of affordable housing for older adults meets Universal Design standards and becomes a major District priority. Acknowledge and support the establishment of senior villages and wellness centers throughout Washington, DC that allow older adults to remain in their homes and/or communities and age in place.

**For the Commission to Consider:** I have lived on this street for almost 20 years. The 6th District Police Department used to be housed in the building at 42nd and Benning Road, and many times was used as a passthrough for police cars responding to an emergency. When other streets around us got speed bumps, 42nd Street was one of the last to get them, I believe, because of this. 6D is now housed at the Old Merritt School on Hayes Street, so police cars no longer need to come through with regularity. However, regular cars do – sometimes at speeds up to 50 mph – and this is with speed humps. I have to be careful myself as I walk my dog in the neighborhood and wonder about the safety of an increased number of seniors, and perhaps their grandchildren, having to deal with this issue.

Also, on Sundays, congregants park along both sides of 42nd Street, which narrow it even further. The two lane street becomes one lane, and cars have to take turns coming up/down. Compound this with speeding (which some cars still do) and I believe the potential for pedestrian incidents increases.

**8. Statement from the Application:** Far Northeast and Southeast Area Element

Policy FNS-1.1.1: Conservation of Low-Density Neighborhoods

Recognize the value and importance of Far Northeast and Southeast's established single-family neighborhoods to the character of the local community and to the entire District. Comprehensive Plan and zoning designations for these neighborhoods reflect and preserve the existing land use pattern while allowing for taller and denser infill development that is compatible with neighborhood character.

**For the Commission to Consider:** I am not sure if site visits are a part of the process when it comes to map amendments, but I am sure if the Commission was to visit the neighborhood, review the site and the surrounding structures, you would see that adding a structure with 4 more stories onto the current location does not "reflect and preserve the existing land use pattern" and that "allowing for taller and denser infill development" is not compatible with our current block or neighborhood character (except as described earlier in this letter regarding structures closer to commercial activity).

**9. Statement from the Application:** Policy FNS-1.1.2: Development of New Housing

Policy FNS-1.1.2: Development of New Housing

Encourage new mixed-use, mixed-income development for area residents on vacant lots and around Metro stations and on underused commercial sites along the area's major avenues. Strongly encourage the rehabilitation and renovation of existing housing in Far Northeast and Southeast and seek to ensure that the housing remains affordable for current and future residents.

**For the Commission to Consider:** The land is not vacant, but under-utilized. As a neighbor, I'd ask the church to consider working within the current zoning configurations to address this need.

**10. Statement from the Application:** Policy FNS-1.1.6: Residential Rehabilitation

Encourage the rehabilitation of single-family homes in the Fairlawn and Twining neighborhoods, as well as the renovation of vacant deteriorating apartment units, especially in Marshall Heights, Lincoln Heights, Northeast Boundary, Greenway, Randle Highlands (south of Pennsylvania Avenue SE), and along 29th Street between Erie and Denver Streets.

**For the Commission to Consider:** Can the church's current buildings be rehabilitated?

The following comments are regarding the Community Outreach and Engagement section of the application:

**Members of the affected community that would potentially be burdened by the proposed zoning action.**

Adjacent property owners may experience construction-related disruptions as well as potential

increases in traffic around the Property. - **Again, I am unsure if an actual site visit is a part of these proceedings but given the narrowness of 42nd Street and the speeding that regularly occurs, I have concerns with this being a construction zone.**

**Also, while work may not occur on Sundays, when there is an event at the church (i.e., community, funeral, wedding, etc.) double parking occurs on the street. These parking/traffic patterns coupled with construction vehicles, equipment, and materials will impose a great burden on those driving through the neighborhood.**

**Potential positive outcomes of the proposed zoning action identified by the affected community.**

The community has generally voiced support for affordable and grand-family housing at the Property. - **While I do believe more affordable housing is need in our city, I do not believe that this project – changing the zoning to R-2 and adding a building up to 50 feet tall at this location – is conducive to the neighborhood.**

**Potential negative outcomes of the proposed zoning action identified by the affected community.**

No specific negative outcomes resulting from the Map Amendment have been identified by the community.- **Hopefully, the points made throughout this letter clearly outline potential negative outcomes/impacts of this change in zoning.**

**Changes/modifications made to the proposed zoning action that incorporate/respond to the input received from the affected community.**

The Map Amendment proposes a zoning map amendment, and, therefore, does not entail a specific proposal to redevelop the Property.

Accordingly, no changes or modifications can be made to the proposed zoning action. - **I was unaware of any other opportunities to express these concerns.**

**Input received from the affected community not incorporated into the proposed zoning action.**

The community has stated an interest in obtaining more details regarding the proposed development under the proposed RA-2 zone, but as mentioned above, the Map Amendment does not provide for an assessment of specific architectural plans. - **I would like a more definitive answer to this question. For example, is the church open to building, but perhaps not as many stories high?**

**Efforts taken to mitigate potential negative outcomes identified by the affected community.**

Since the Applicant proposes a Map Amendment, there are no specific mitigation measures warranted at this time.

As I stated in my opening, I am a proponent of affordable housing. I've lived in the Ward for decades and was part of the Deanwood History Committee which brought the first Cultural Tourism walking trail East of the River to Ward 7. I understand and appreciate the community's history and need for affordable housing. However, I do not believe granting an R-2 designation at this particular location will ensure that the site remains "compatible with the surrounding neighborhood" given the scale and aesthetics of the surrounding residences. I hope the Commission will strongly consider the points made throughout this letter as it makes its decision.

Respectfully submitted,

Kia Chatmon

Submitted on 9/14/2025 by:

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303 42nd Street, NE Washington, DC 20019