



THE WASHINGTON CHAPTER OF THE  
AMERICAN INSTITUTE OF ARCHITECTS

5 January 2026

District of Columbia Zoning Commission  
441 4th St NW # 200  
Washington, DC 20001  
DCOZ@dc.gov

Re: ZC 25-08 RA-1 Text Amendments

Chairman Hood and members of the Commission:

I am representing the Washington Chapter of the American Institute of Architects (AIA | DC) as a member of the Advocacy Committee. Additionally, I volunteer with the Small Firm Exchange, where many of my colleagues design buildings directly impacted by these regulations. As previously noted, the Advocacy Committee is currently reviewing Zoning Commission cases to provide informed feedback from our membership.

The RA-1 Zone presents an opportunity to introduce gentle density and Missing Middle housing types within the District, an increasingly important typology in numerous residential zones across the city. We commend the Office of Planning for their efforts to clarify processes and reduce the need for special exception relief, as well as for the care and attention invested in this proposal.

We have identified three areas in which minor corrections could significantly improve the zoning regulations for the RA-1 zone:

- Expand the matter-of-right density to six units, which would accommodate small multifamily developments and clarify that new dwelling units may be included in newly constructed gross square footage. The overall bulk remains regulated by the moderate 0.9 FAR and 40-foot height limitations and can address issues of scale.
- Permit habitable penthouse spaces in multifamily buildings. Our interpretation of Section C 1501.1 suggests that current regulations prohibit such use in the RA-1 zone. Adjusting this provision would allow residents access to rooftop areas for both recreation and maintenance, including mechanical systems and green spaces.
- Reducing side yard requirements to 5 feet for buildings with six or fewer units should be considered. For example, on a typical 30-foot-wide lot, the current rules (two side yards of 8 feet each) leave only 14 feet for building width. Detached structures are generally better because they offer all units improved light and airflow. Lowering the requirement would make detached

buildings more feasible while still ensuring enough privacy and space between them. However, keeping the 8-foot side yard rule for buildings with seven or more units remains suitable.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify and for your continued commitment to shaping the built environment of our city.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of several bold, slanted strokes followed by a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Will Teass, AIA

Cc Malina Pickard, Co-chair, AIA|DC Advocacy Committee  
Liz Kovacevic, Co-chair, AIA|DC Advocacy Committee