

Zoning Case 25-11

Chairman Hood and Members of the Zoning Commission:

Having spent an enormous amount of time trying to prevent inappropriate pop-ups and pop-backs in rowhouse neighborhoods like mine, I am very disappointed to see this proposed action to undo that work. While I am pleased that the Office of Planning altered their original request after receiving negative feedback at the meeting with on-the-ground ANC Commissioners, this amendment is still a step in the wrong direction.

One thing that I have not heard addressed is the benefit of the discouraging element of required BZA approval for these major additions. Flippers are responsible for most of the large alterations in my neighborhood, if they have the time, as they have a financial incentive to go before BZA. More than one rowhouse in Bloomingdale was renovated and popped back even further than the approved plans allowed. The changes proposed will encourage more of this work by removing the easily passed hurdle created by 14-11. Now neighbors and flippers who want to expand will probably expand to the maximum with little oversight “just because” they can with only the remaining hurdle of the expense of construction.

Perhaps you remember the horror stories in the testimony of neighbors who lived next to these monstrosities? One neighbor made several attempts to maintain a pleasant green space behind their home after one of the huge additions went up next door, but after years of only being able to grow mud, they hardscaped the back yard. (This does not help the effort to curb flooding runoff in our area.) Now these neighbors have moved.

As for the elusive affordable housing in DC, in my neighborhood, we have one IZ unit that was created pre-Covid in one of the few MU-4 rowhouses. That unit is still owned by the developer. We also have an affordable unit in each of our two Vacant to Vibrant properties. One is rented and the other has been for sale since March of 2024. Chopping up rowhouses does not seem to be a solution for affordable housing, at least not a solution that outweighs the detriment to the existing neighbors.

As a senior, I do not understand the argument about seniors aging in place. After spending just a short period of time in a wheelchair, and additional time on crutches, my rowhouse presented many challenges greater than how to negotiate a small bedroom. The stairs, both interior and exterior, posed a much greater problem. Also, even if I was not limited by lot occupancy restrictions, an addition to my home would be a much more expensive and disruptive project than an interior only renovation.

Although the percentage of rowhouses In ANC5E that could be adversely affected by this change is considerably less than half, ANC5E did not consider or vote on this case. They did however support Zoning Case 14-11.

While I am making a fervent plea to maintain the work that has been done in the past and deny this case, if you choose to go forward with this proposal, I would ask that you consider setting a limit for larger additions, at which point a variance would be required, not just a special exception. I have heard Zoning Commissioners suggest that the regulations should be reviewed when they sit in and consider BZA cases, but I expected a strengthening of the regulations such as making a request for a larger addition a variance, and not a loosening of the regulations. The exception would be that I have heard comments that implied a twelve foot addition might make more sense than a ten foot addition, and that is now what is proposed as a matter of right for the upper floors. This is too much since it could still be coupled with a larger first floor addition.

Also, please keep in mind the loosening of regulations about balconies and ground level decks in the proposals of ZC 25-12 that may exacerbate larger additions.

Thank you for your consideration.

Betsy McDaniel
Bloomingdale resident
October 24, 2024