

Zoning Commission Case 25-13
December 11, 2025
Testimony of WIN Ward 3 Affordable Housing Work Group

Chairman Hood and Members of the Commission:

My name is Elizabeth Vaden, and I am testifying on behalf of the Washington Interfaith Network (WIN) Ward 3 Affordable Housing Work Group, in support of the map and text amendments that would upzone parcels along the Wisconsin Avenue corridor from Friendship Heights to just south of Tenleytown. I live just two blocks from the Friendship Heights Metro station, and I worship at St. Columba's Episcopal Church, a WIN congregation located one block from the Tenleytown-AU Metro station. Other WIN Ward 3 institutions are Adas Israel, Chevy Chase Presbyterian, National United Methodist, and Temple Sinai, many of whose members live, work, and patronize businesses along the Wisconsin Avenue corridor.

As you know from WIN Ward 3's prior statements before this commission, our efforts are focused on increasing the stock of affordable housing in the Rock Creek West planning area. We have seen some modest progress since Mayor Bowser issued her housing equity report in 2019, including the opening of The Louise on Western with 93 affordable units for seniors, and the promise of 100+ units at the Chevy Chase Civic Core. But we have a long way to go. We also need solutions that take into account that most of the land in Upper Northwest is privately owned.

We support the map and text amendments put forth by the Office of Planning for several reasons:

- The effort to develop these new zoning rules named the need for new affordable housing as a top priority. It is no secret that the cost of housing in Ward 3 is out of reach for many lower-income families, while the cost of construction is skyrocketing and the availability of capital has shrunk.
- The corridor is a perfect site for changes to enable and encourage increased height and density. It has excellent public transportation options – including two Metro stations where height and density changes will be most profound – as well as a robust bus network. Our neighborhood is rich with other family-friendly amenities including excellent public schools, parks, and a wealth of grocery stores, and we are eager to make them available to those who have been priced out of this area for far too long. Even so, much of the corridor remains underdeveloped, with 1-2 story buildings and many empty storefronts.
- These changes will ensure that height and density increases are a matter of right, forgoing the need for building owners to go through the cumbersome spot zoning or planned unit development process to build more housing, including more affordable units. While we applaud the efforts of ANC 3E in securing valuable public benefits – including affordable housing – as part of its PUDs, other developers have chosen paths with less resistance (see for example the development of luxury apartments at the old

Mazza Gallerie site) with more limited requirements to produce affordable units. Affordable housing gains are more likely to be secured if building owners are subject to IZ+, the time from concept to occupancy is shorter, and the risk of costly and time-consuming litigation is minimized.

- Some neighbors have expressed fear that development would look like downtown Bethesda or Rosslyn, Virginia, where some building heights now exceed 300 feet. Even setting aside the hyperbole, we think OP's proposed amendments are sensitive to the existing context. The map and text amendments sensibly propose to maximize height and density near the Tenleytown and Friendship Heights Metro stations within reasonable limits, while providing for more modest upzoning along other parts of the corridor that could also support new housing.

I would also like to take this opportunity to note how much WIN Ward 3 has appreciated the multiple opportunities that OP offered to neighbors to provide input, including walking tours and workshops, as well as more formal opportunities for comment. We strongly disagree that the process has been too fast or ignored community concerns. The proposed zoning changes grew out of a lengthy public process over the past three years to prepare the Wisconsin Avenue Development Framework, which in turn flowed from the Comprehensive Plan revision process.

In summary, in our view, the map and text amendments before you today will facilitate a more lively and inclusive community along Wisconsin Avenue, with more opportunities to build affordable housing as well as support neighborhood-serving retail and services. We urge you to approve these map and text amendments.

Respectfully,

Elizabeth Vaden, on behalf of
WIN Ward 3 Affordable Housing Work Group