

Testimony of Mary Alice Levine
DC Zoning Commission
December 11, 2025

My name is Mary Alice Levine, and I am testifying in opposition to Zoning Case No. 25-13.

I deplore OP's upzoning of Wisconsin Avenue and particularly the doubling of allowed heights and densities at the Tenleytown and the Friendship Heights Metro Stations. These changes will destroy the characters of two historic middle-class neighborhoods and rob the single family homes immediately off the Avenue of their tranquility. As it stands with the IZ Plus formula, the buildings resulting from the upzone will bring scant affordable housing to the area, and even less diversity. This upzoning is for 116 lots, for which no new development has yet been proposed.

The upzoning ignores all matters of infrastructure, including the lack of neighborhood public schools, lack of future water and sewer capacity and effects of construction and height on the surrounding neighborhoods.

In addition, the upzoning will make enormous density a matter of right, and OP is planning to permit builders, without any review from the community, to further the dubious goal of leaving residents out of the planning process. Design review will be completed with government functionaries relying on a checklist of requirements that may completely belie the goal for the beautiful new community that OP is promising us. There is no consideration for the continued preservation of the historic landmarks that surround the proposed Tenley Metro upzoned area.

I am a resident of Tenleytown, just two and a half blocks east of Wisconsin Avenue and one-half block from the OP study area. I am testifying today about proposed zoning in Tenleytown, though many of my points can also be made for Friendship Heights. OP's plans for height and density will have shameful impacts on both Tenleytown and Friendship Heights.

Effect of massive new buildings on the neighborhoods: neighborhood character, green space, deprivation of community input into planning

OP uses new zones, created from standard mixed-use zones up and down Wisconsin Avenue. There are two specially created zones adding height and density to the standard MU-10 zones in the Metro station areas. The new, custom M-10 TTM zone, planned for

Tenleytown around Metro, allows a height of 110 feet plus a 20 foot penthouse , or 130 feet total height. This MU-10 TTM zone would allow a 7.2 FAR to the Metro area in the middle of Tenleytown. Compare this to the existing zoning which allows heights of 62 to 80 feet and a FAR of 3.0 to 4.8 in the middle of Tenleytown. Surrounding this proposed zone on Wisconsin Avenue and within one block, are landmarked properties that will be compromised by new heights and massive construction. I note Fort Reno, Jackson Reid High School, Janney Elementary School, Eldbrooke Church, the Methodist Cemetery, Cityline and other buildings. And then there are the many buildings that contribute to the historic character of the neighborhood without having been landmarked yet.

Areas on Wisconsin Avenue, outside the Metro areas will also be upzoned dramatically, with building heights and FAR doubling. These also include landmarked buildings on Wisconsin.

On the west side of the 4400 block of Wisconsin, neighbors are apprehensive about what could be a particularly unhappy turn as a result of this upzone. This is an institutional block: Tenley-Friendship Library, St. Ann's Academy and St. Ann's Church inhabit this part of the Avenue between Albemarle and Yuma. Janney Elementary School land on Albemarle is adjacent to the back of the Library. OP Plans to add moderate residential zoning to the government and institutional zoning of the Library and the St. Ann's Academy lands. This vibrant heart of Tenleytown could be swallowed up by density, and Janney land, as has happened in the past, could be eyed for a zoning exception for the development of housing to replace its garden. This addition of unneeded height and unneeded housing would be a shocking loss of community meeting space and green space.

As above, the doubling of height and density will create a matter of right gift to developers, and will ensure no special exceptions or design review.. There will rarely be a need for PUDs, and absolutely no need or opportunity for the community, including ANCs, to have any say in the approval process or design review of buildings that rival downtown structures in height. And the zoning will be assigned and remain in place before any new developments are proposed. Neither residents, nor OP, have any notions of when the massive development will come.

This canyonization of Wisconsin Avenue will deprive residents and visitors of light, air and green space, not only on the Avenue but also on nearby streets. Jarring noise and traffic will deprive the entire neighborhood of the tranquility it once had and will drive out those who can afford to leave. Neighbors will suffer from the loss or diminishment of the Tenley

Library. Janney Elementary School will suffer from additional overcrowding (where an easy fix would be to plan an elementary school for Friendship Heights).

Effects of dramatic upzoning on affordable housing and neighborhood diversity.

Without rules to ensure affordable housing, developers are inclined to build expensive housing that they can sell or rent at market value to maximize profits. DC's "Inclusionary Zoning Plus" law (IZ Plus) requires developers to provide a certain amount of affordable housing in many developments. But IZ Plus is inadequate: it does not provide any deeply affordable housing, nor any diversity. Nor does it provide more middle class affordable housing as buildings become taller and denser. And the OP setdown report provides no guarantee that IZ Plus will even apply to the Wisconsin Avenue upzone. I support the many others testifying to the details of this issue of IZ Plus inadequacy.

Lack of Area Infrastructure

In its inadequate Infrastructure Assessment for WADF, OP admits that DC WASA has said drinking water and sewage facilities are at capacity in this area. I know this is also the case on Connecticut Avenue in Cleveland Park, where OP cites the same situation. We don't know how widespread the issue is. But this week, WTOP reported that,

"New research from the Interstate Commission on the Potomac River Basin shows the region's water supply could fail to meet the area's needs by 2030, in the event of an extreme drought.

Changing weather patterns and **increased water [demand]** would strain the Potomac River, which serves as the primary — and, in some cases, sole — water supply for water companies in D.C., Virginia and Maryland." [WTOP, December 5, 2025]

The Infrastructure Assessment ignores many other obvious infrastructure needs of the WADF development. First and foremost, the plan ignores the need for more public schools in Tenleytown and Friendship Heights neighborhoods, even without development. No land in the study area has been set aside for a new elementary school to catch the overflow at Janney Elementary, which is at 100% capacity. The nearby Jackson Reid High School is at 115% capacity. A new elementary school is especially needed in Friendship Heights, where the Lord and Taylor building could have fit the bill, but has now been purchased by WMATA for a new bus garage. OP could have designated the current WMATA site on Wisconsin for institutional use, but instead, earmarked it for medium density housing.

Likewise, Tenley-Friendship Library and St. Ann's Academy in Tenleytown could have kept their current institutional and government designations, and those spaces might have been used as extra classrooms for neighboring Janney Elementary School and Jackson-Read High School. With their new zoning designations for moderate and medium density housing, the market value of the land on these two sites will increase dramatically, and DC Public Schools may not be able to purchase the land for educational uses.

Nor does this Infrastructure Assessment mention ground water issues. Underground streams that have been diverted for years into basements at St. Ann's, the Library and individual homes will be diverted further with the construction of buildings of unprecedented heights. These neighborhood problems, which occurred with the building of the Wilson Pool and the Metro are likely to re-surface with massive excavation of land. DC Public Library never found out the source of the water that entered the basement of the Tenley-Friendship Library and resulted in a swimming pool in the late 1990s and early 2000s. (As a result, the new Tenley-Friendship Library, opened in 2011, was built without a basement.) Without an assessment, we don't know the consequences of unprecedented tall building construction.

OP should be trying to make all of DC an attractive place to live and work. If OP believes that all areas of DC should be equally desirable for families and individuals, then degrading middle class areas of Ward 3 is not the answer. Instead, the city should be planning to increase the desirability of other areas in order to introduce equity and equality.

Respectfully submitted,

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