



December 10, 2025

Chairman Hood and Members of the Zoning Commission:

Re: Case No. 25-13

The Committee of 100 on the Federal City (C100) offers the following comments in opposition to the Office of Planning's proposed text and map amendments for the upper Wisconsin Avenue area (Case No. 25-13).

The Committee of 100 (C100) has reviewed OP's proposal and is compelled to say that the Office of Planning's (OP's) proposal reveals a lack of actual planning. The proposal for the most part recommends the highest density and height possible under the Comprehensive Plan Amendments of 2021 despite the fact that the Comprehensive Plan specifically states that "[t]he designation of an area with a particular Future Land Use Map category does not necessarily mean that the most intense zoning district described in that category is automatically permitted."¹ Also, as we point out, the proposed zoning for the area between Tenleytown and Friendship Heights exceeds even what is authorized under the Comp Plan. A planning department should present the Zoning Commission with data and comparative development scenarios that help the Zoning Commission articulate why they are taking an action. OP has not done that. The Zoning Commission has one option before it for each of the zone areas even though there are other possible options.

Description of the Neighborhoods

DC is a city of neighborhoods. Among city neighborhoods, Friendship Heights and Tenleytown stand out as vibrant, middle class family communities. Both communities are home to young children, as well as older residents, many of whom have lived here for decades. What is missing from OP's proposal is any attempt to maintain neighborhood character. Instead, OP proposes to rezone both areas to downtown height and density (150 feet in height in the case of Friendship Heights and 130 feet in Tenleytown).

Friendship Heights Metro Mixed-Use Zone. Friendship Heights is an established, close-knit community. OP proposes applying an altered MU-10 zone to allow 7.8 residential FAR and 6.0 commercial FAR. At Mazza Gallerie and the recent PUD across Wisconsin (ZC Case No. 96-13A), the developer determined that only first floor retail is needed, so why is OP calling for 6.0 in nonresidential FAR in the rest of Friendship Heights? Does OP see the area again becoming a regional commercial center? What data does OP have that contradicts these market trends? The neighborhood suffered a blow during COVID

¹ Comprehensive Plan's Framework Element, p. 2-62.

when it lost the Mazza Gallerie and Chevy Chase Pavilion, both of which served as places for the community to gather. OP's plan fails to address the changes in the real estate market that are underway.

Tenleytown Metro Mixed-Use Zone. As in Friendship Heights, OP increases the height maximum in Tenleytown. In this case to 110 feet plus a 20-foot penthouse, for a total of 130 feet. Again, OP is proposing downtown development standards (MU-10) with no persuasive reasons why this makes sense. The Tenleytown commercial strip consisting mostly of one-story retail is similar in many respects to Cleveland Park. There, OP is calling for MU-8A in accordance with the Comp Plan. C100 believes the same result is appropriate in Tenleytown.

Across Wisconsin Avenue from the proposed 130-foot zone is an institutional block, currently devoted to religious and educational uses. OP wants to zone the educational resources for moderate density housing. This is the home of the Tenley-Friendship Library which borders Janney Elementary School to the west and St. Ann's School to its immediate south on Wisconsin. These are prime education lots that should be preserved as such. Yet, OP is proposing to upzone the Tenley-Friendship Library and St. Ann's School to a mixed-use zone, robbing the neighborhood of much needed classroom and green space.

In Tenleytown, part of the existing zoning is MU-7B, which allows significant development opportunities. Yet, most of the commercial area has not changed. How will doubling the allowable FAR and height maximum change that situation? Upzoning will result in land speculation, but will it benefit the community?

Wisconsin Avenue Mixed-Use Zone. OP's proposal for the long strip that runs along Wisconsin between the two metro stations reveals OP's preference for cookie-cutter development. Moreover, **OP's proposal for this area is inconsistent with the Comprehensive Plan.** As in Cleveland Park,² OP has chosen MU-8A with an increased residential FAR of 5.4, whereas under the Comprehensive Plan base FAR cannot be higher than 4.0 except to accommodate affordable housing. OP is also asking to increase the height maximum to 75 feet with no explanation as to why. MU-8A is the wrong zone choice; MU-5A would be a better choice because it would allow significant new development opportunities, including housing, while not overwhelming the low-density adjoining neighborhoods.

OP Abandons Design Review for Cookie-Cutter Uniformity

OP released the Wisconsin Avenue Development Framework (WADF)³, the predicate for this zoning action, in September 2023 and issued the final report in February 2024. The WADF focused on increasing building heights and densities on the corridor to that permitted under the Comprehensive Plan. The WADF recommended a Zoning Commission design review process for the high-density metro zones at Friendship Heights and Tenleytown. Importantly, the WADF stated: "It is recommended that Design Review, as currently described in the zoning regulations, be applied to the high-density mixed-use areas covered by the proposed Friendship Heights Metro Zone and Tenleytown Metro Zone. The purpose of Design Review is to promote high-quality, contextual design, by allowing for review against specified criteria as identified in this Development Framework. The process entails a public hearing with review

² See OP Report for Case No. 25-09, Exhibit 118, p.8.

³ The WADF can be found at Exhibit 3 for Case No. 25-13.

and approval by the Zoning Commission.”⁴ Thus, the WADF calls for continued planning, but that requirement is now missing.

The community expected that this approach would be reflected in the proposed text and map amendments. The current proposed zoning action basically codifies maximum heights and densities allowed by the Comprehensive Plan without providing for any real planning. Regrettably, OP has pirouetted to a top-down, directed design approach. While the text amendments contain some design elements, this is not what is contemplated by the WADF. C100 sees several problems with this approach.

- First, the proposed amendments do not define superior contextual design.
- Second, the prescribed design review elements will apply to the entire one-and-a-half-mile corridor, which means all buildings will look basically the same. Design variety is a way to disrupt the monotony of composition. It creates visual interest in design. Any insistence on high-quality contextual design is missing from OP’s proposal.
- Third, since any construction will be matter of right (MOR), there will be no formal opportunity for the ANC and the community or even the Zoning Commission to have any influence over design.

OP states that the WADF recommendation was intended to promote high-quality, contextual design by allowing for review against specified criteria as identified in this Development Framework.⁵ OP now proposes that new developments are expected to be mainly by-right and states that a form-based zone, as initially proposed, would typically require discretionary review by staff and/or a review body established for that review. A developer’s matter-of-right project would only have to satisfy the sketchy Design Review requirements that OP has proposed in the accompanying zoning map amendment text.

Matter of Right Development Forecloses Public Participation

OP in essence is interpreting the Comprehensive Plan’s Future Land Use Map (FLUM) guidelines as authorizing development to the maximum height and density permitted for most of the corridor. If OP’s proposal is approved, there will be no review of any future development in these areas by the two Advisory Neighborhood Commissions (ANCs) or the Zoning Commission. This means, for example, that the corridor could be built to the maximum height and density as a matter of right without any meaningful public review.

The Zoning Commission should not be bestowing the unearned gift of matter-of-right zoning to landowners/developers with no opportunity for meaningful review by affected individuals, neighborhood organizations, the affected ANCs and even the Zoning Commission. Even without approval of OP’s proposal, there likely will be continuing changes in DC and along Wisconsin Avenue, like those over the last five years. For example, who would have foreseen ten years ago that Friendship Heights would no longer be a regional retail center? There is no reason to grant a developer the generous height and density gift into the future without meaningful

⁴ *Id.*, p.42

⁵ OP Report for ZC 25-13, Exhibit 129, pp. 10-11.

public input. Moreover, giving landowners these rights can only lead to disruptive land speculation.

There is every reason to require developers to show their cards to the community and get formal approval of changes before granting them such abundant height and density gifts. Zoning regulations have intentionally limited development standards along corridors outside of downtown because they adjoin neighborhoods where residents want compatible scale and massing of buildings with the character of the neighborhood. PUDs have been an option for developers who want more density and height and are willing to work with local ANCs and residents on thoughtful compromises and convince the Zoning Commission that the project would be of superior quality and result in measurable local benefits. That process was rarely used downtown where office buildings predominated and low-density neighborhoods were less intertwined. Now OP wants to extend downtown office building density to adjoin low density neighborhoods and bar ANCs and residents from engaging in how such massive development could blend with existing neighborhoods. **C100 urges the Zoning Commission to resist what is essentially an undemocratic silencing of the public when it comes to development.** The ZC should write zoning regulations that are consistent with the FLUM and provide ongoing opportunities for the ZC, ANCs, and the public to shape our city. It would be a mistake for the ZC to decide that large developments or any development along a corridor is exempt from any public involvement.

Need for Affordable Housing Equity

A. The IZ+ Requirement Should Be Hard Wired

Because this is a map amendment case, any new housing capacity it generates will be subject to the enhanced inclusionary zoning requirements of IZ Plus.⁶ The general IZ+ set-aside requirement is a sliding scale up to 18 or 20 percent of the total residential floor area. It is determined by the percentage increase from the maximum permitted density of the former zone to the total density built in the new residential development.

The very large density increases proposed for Wisconsin Avenue have the potential to generate significant amounts of new housing, with the IZ+ set-aside under the current regulation ranging mainly from 14% to 18%, with some sites having lower requirements. However, the actual text of the proposed rules needs to be strengthened to assure that the professed intent to produce a significant number of affordable units comes to fruition as Wisconsin Avenue is redeveloped over the next 25 years.

⁶ IZ+ is triggered through a map amendment and establishes an affordable unit set-aside requirement higher than regular IZ. For IZ+ to apply, the rezoning must result in a zone that permits higher density development than the former zone and not be located in an area with an overconcentration of existing affordable housing.

The Commission should make sure that the affordable housing obligation is clear and binding. In this case, OP proposes language that encourages but does not fully mandate IZ+. The Purpose and Intent provisions for upzoning Wisconsin Avenue state that the upzoning will: “Allow and encourage residential development and a greater range of resident diversity to advance the District’s housing equity goals, and by mapping the MU-10A/FHM zone as subject to IZ Plus” However, the text of the proposed rules does not state affirmatively that IZ+ must be mapped onto the affected parcels. Unless that language is included, the applicability of IZ+ remains discretionary or at least ambiguous.

B. The IZ+ Income Eligibility Standards Should be Lowered to Match Median Income for Black Households in DC and Facilitate Greater Racial and Income Diversity

OP has included an unprecedented statement in the Purpose and Intent section of the proposed new zones that allowing for more housing construction will “accommodate a greater range of resident diversity to advance the District’s housing equity goals...” Ward 3 is predominantly white and is one of the more expensive areas in the City to live. It is considered a high-opportunity area where the Council has legislated incentives to produce higher concentrations of affordable housing in new developments.

OP’s intent to facilitate housing equity, however, cannot be achieved if these zoning proposals are not revised. IZ provides discounted rents to a handful of middle income and workforce households consisting of one or two individuals. Because of the black/white income gap in the District, Black households generally cannot qualify for the program without a subsidy (voucher) from another program.

Absent revision, the Purpose and Intent statement is meaningless. The DC median family income for Black households in 2024 was \$60,591⁷. The HUD DC regional median family income in 2024 was \$154,700. Sixty percent (60%) of the latter number (\$92,820) is the income ceiling for the Inclusionary Zoning program. It should be obvious that allowing higher income households to compete for units reduces the chances of Black households for the affordable housing units produced through IZ or IZ+.

To achieve the diversity that OP says is the purpose of the new zones, the income eligibility standard needs to be lowered. For example, the proposed regulation could require that half of the affordable rental units be set aside for households with incomes at or below 30% MFI and half for households with incomes 31 to 50% MFI. This action is consistent with the Comprehensive Plan Housing Element⁸. While lowering the maximum income eligibility for IZ+

⁷ DC Fiscal Policy Institute

⁸ “More deeply affordable housing production and preservation is needed to advance racial equity in housing because of the racial income gap. As shown in Figure 5.8, the proposed allocation of new affordable units should be 40 percent available to extremely low-income households, and 30 percent allocated each for low- and very low-income households. These targets would prioritize production and preservation of housing affordable to more of the District’s residents of color. Achieving these targets requires actions from the public, non-profit, and private sector.” Housing Element of the Comprehensive Plan, p. 5-24.

for these proposals is not inconsistent with the IZ regulation, it would need to be baked into the proposal to be an enforceable condition. The Commission has authority to do this. Does it have the will?

The Required Amount of Affordable Housing Should Match the Amount of New Density Provided By the Map Amendment

For concrete and steel construction, in this area, the maximum IZ+ set-aside requirement is 18% of residential floor area for projects where the percent increase in the FAR utilized is more than 125%. There are many sites in the Wisconsin Avenue corridor where OP is proposing to increase the allowable density that would trigger higher IZ+ requirements if the ladder in C§1003.4 were extended beyond 18%.

For example, in Friendship Heights, some sites have been upzoned from MU-4 to MU-10A/FHM. For MU-4 the base maximum density is 2.5 (with an IZ bonus of 20% to 3.0). The proposed zoning allows for a density of 7.8. If that density is fully utilized, that would be an increase of 212%. If the increase in the set-aside requirement were to continue beyond the 18% cap, the requirement for a density increase of 212% would be 24% of the residential floor area.

Similarly, there are lots which would be upzoned from MU-3B to MU-8A/WA. If the proposed density was fully utilized, the percent increase in FAR utilized would be 170%. With the ladder in C§1003.4 truncated at 18%, the IZ+ set-aside requirement would be 18% of residential floor area. If, however, the required set-aside schedule was extended and continued to add 2% bonus density for each 25% increase total FAR utilized, the set aside requirement would be 20% of residential floor area for these lots where the percent increase in FAR is from “more than 150% up to and including 175%.”

In the Friendship Heights Transition Area, current zoning is R-2, and it is proposed that those lots be upzoned to RA-2, with a maximum FAR of 2.16. If the proposed density were fully utilized, that would be a FAR increase from 0.4 to 2.16, a 440% increase. If the IZ+ set-aside requirement ladder was extended, an increase of “more than 425% up to and including 450%” would have a set-aside requirement of 42% of residential floor area.⁹

The problems with the District’s IZ program are well recognized. *See, e.g.*, Tracey Zhang, Making Inclusionary Zoning more Inclusive: How DC Should Reform Its Inclusionary Zoning Program to Account for Income, Racial and Geographic Segregation, XXVII Georgetown J. on Poverty Law and Policy 171, 174 (Fall 2019) (“The level of economic and racial segregation in D.C. means that 60% MFI is still higher than the median income in D.C.’s poorest wards”). <<https://www.law.georgetown.edu/poverty-journal/wp-content/uploads/sites/25/2019/12/27-1-Zhang.pdf>>

⁹ The required percentage of residential floor area can be reduced below 42% when the allowed density is not fully utilized. For example, if the project had an FAR of 2.0 rather than 2.16, the IZ+ set-aside requirement would be 38% of the residential floor area.

In all these cases the new density constitutes an unearned gift to the landowner. The Zoning Commission can fix this gap by requiring sufficient affordable housing to match the unearned density.

The Required Infrastructure Evaluation is Missing

The DC Council created Future Planning Analysis Areas on the Generalized Policy Map, including the upper Wisconsin area. The Implementation Element of the Comprehensive Plan states that: “the planning process should evaluate current infrastructure and utility capacity against full build out and projected population and employment growth. Planning should also focus on issues most relevant to the community that can be addressed through a planning process.”¹⁰ OP in this case has failed to provide the Zoning Commission with a report on infrastructure, though there is a sketchy report on OP’s website. That report, dated March 2024, lacks detail, which perhaps is the reason it is being withheld.

The infrastructure report available on OP’s website states that full buildout permitted by the FLUM, will result in the population in the study area increasing from 4,200 to 18,100, a 333% increase. As stated, OP is proposing that density be increased to the max along most of the corridor. Two areas that need to be addressed by OP are schools and water and sewer capacity.

A. There Is a Current and Future Need for More Schools and Recreational Space

The Zoning Commission should not consider upzoning along Wisconsin Avenue until plans have been made to expand public school capacity. OP must address the reality that most of the schools in the Friendship Heights and Tenleytown areas are already overcrowded. Janney Elementary School and Jackson-Reed High School are well above student capacity, and Deal Middle School is currently close to capacity. These schools would be stressed further by the influx of 13,900 new residents, including school-aged children.

Even though local schools are overcrowded, OP’s proposal does not plan for addressing current and future overcrowding, particularly at Janney. In fact, OP proposes to upzone institutional and governmental space in Tenleytown that would be ideal for extra classroom space. Instead, that land will be zoned for moderate density housing.

B. Water and Sewer

According to the infrastructure report, the Wisconsin Avenue Development area’s existing sanitary sewer system is already running at full capacity. The report also states that the existing water system in the area is also running at full capacity. Is OP planning for how these systems can service 13,900 new residents? These findings came from DC Water. DC Water informed C100 on October 20, 2025, that the assessment contained in that report has not changed.

¹⁰ Comprehensive Plan’s Implementation Element, p. 25-7.

Existing Small Businesses and Other Tenants May be Adversely Impacted Immediately

Upzoning changes the value of the underlying property and the buildings currently on it. The one-step *en masse* re-zoning could result in increased property tax assessments if the Office of Tax and Revenue assessed all property in the corridor at the highest and best use, as it is supposed to do.

OTR is obligated to take changes in zoning (among other factors) into consideration in assessing properties for tax purposes.¹¹ This means that, in conducting its annual review of assessments, OTR may factor in the higher potential zoning of properties along the Wisconsin Avenue corridor. The general principle of highest and best use in assessments can and does allow looking at what could be built under the applicable zoning. While the decision is up to the Department of Tax and Revenue, the provision certainly allows them to take the zoning parameters into consideration.

While actual redevelopment along the corridor will take years, current landowners could almost immediately face higher property taxes, which will be passed on to tenants, including small businesses. Small businesses unable to pay higher rents will be forced to vacate, leaving even more empty space. OP needs to address the displacement potential.

Conclusion

For the reasons explained above, the Committee of 100 opposes the current proposals from the Office of Planning. The proposals reveal a serious shortage of actual planning. Economic equity is not assured. OP also has opted to propose adoption of the maximum density allowed without any analysis of the needs of the neighborhoods involved and the ability of infrastructure to handle the population increase. The Comprehensive Plan specifically suggests that less than maximum density be considered.¹² Importantly, given that the proposal, if adopted without change, will authorize matter-of-right development along the entire mile-and-a-half corridor, there needs to be a vehicle for public participation. Design review, which OP originally endorsed, would provide such a vehicle. The Commission could also authorize lower zones, which would open the door for public involvement through the PUD process.

¹¹ DC Code §47-820.

¹² Comprehensive Plan's Framework Element, p.2-62.