

Zoning Commission Case 25-13
Text/Map Amendment to create and map new
Wisconsin Avenue Mixed Use zones:
Friendship Heights Metro Mixed Use Zone (MU10/FHM);
Friendship Heights Transition Area (RA-2);
Tenley Town Metro Mixed Use Zone (MU-10/TTM);
and Wisconsin Avenue Mixed Use Zone (MU-8A/WA) between
Western Avenue and Rodman Street, N.W.)
Comments of Marilyn J. Simon
December 10, 2025

I have been a resident of Friendship Heights since I bought my house in 1985. One of the upzoned properties is directly across the street from my home, and my house is in the Study Area for the Wisconsin Avenue Development Framework. In these comments, I address four issues:

(1) Affordable Housing: The language of the text amendment is not explicit in requiring the amount affordable housing outlined in the Office of Planning’s description of the proposed amendments or the purpose and intent sections of the text amendment; and even with IZ+ required, the amount of affordable housing that would be required and the income levels of eligible households do not come close to the expectations set by the Office of Planning, and pales in comparison to the huge increases in height and density being gifted to the current landowners.

(2) Transportation Infrastructure: The DDOT Report fails to evaluate the adequacy of the transportation infrastructure to support, or be improved to support, the level of development associated with these proposed text and map amendments.

(3) Failure to consider the amount of potential development in the zoning envelope in the infrastructure analyses: The documents provided by OP on infrastructure do not take into account the potential development with these map amendments, where in the MU-10A/FHM, there could be over 4 million square feet of additional development on land that is currently not being used.

(4) The Proposed Heights and Densities are out of scale with the area: According to the Comprehensive Plan, “The 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.” The Friendship Heights commercial area is surrounded by a neighborhood of predominantly two-store single family homes. Heights of 130 feet plus a penthouse and downtown FAR limits are not appropriate for this area.

1. Affordable Housing

The text amendment includes language on housing, affordable housing and IZ+ in the “purpose and intent” sections: G §800.1(b) for MU-10/FHM (page 38 of the OP Hearing Report), G §900.1(b) for MU-10/TTM (page 45 of the OP Hearing Report), and G §1000.1(c) for MU-8A/WA (page 50 of the OP Hearing Report).

A statement in the purpose and intent section is not sufficient to incorporate IZ-Plus into the zoning map and require that developers follow the IZ-Plus set-aside requirements. The proposed text does not include sufficient explicit language to unambiguously require IZ-Plus in future projects on the sites that are being upzoned.

There is a reference to IZ+ in Table G §804.1, G §904.1 and G §1002.1, the maximum permitted FAR in these zones, but that falls far short of a statement that IZ+ is required in these zones. In addition, since the projects will likely be matter of right, it is essential that the IZ+ set-aside requirement be carefully reviewed, and care be given to confirm that it is based on the maximum permitted FAR (exclusive of the 20% IZ bonus) at the time of approval of this map amendment. This detailed information should be included in the Zoning Order, as described in X § 502.4, with care given to some of the large split-zone lots.

IZ+ does not reach lower income households, but instead provides subsidized housing to households who can afford market rate units in DC

Even if the language is corrected and there is explicit language requiring IZ-Plus on the upzoned sites and clarifying how the set-aside requirement will be calculated, the amount of inclusionary zoned housing and the target incomes fall short of how the Office of Planning claims the upzoning will address diversity and affordable housing goals. Under IZ-Plus, IZ rental units will be affordable to households with incomes at 60% of MFI, and IZ ownership units will be affordable to households with incomes at 80% of MFI. For 2025, the income limit for 60% MFI for a two-person household is \$78,720 (US Dept. of Housing and Urban Development, June 1, 2025.) The Zoning Commission can require deeper affordable units or more affordable units for the large increase in allowable density with these map and text amendments.

IZ+ does not necessarily provide significant amounts of affordable housing, especially given the huge increases in allowable density:

In a least one rezoned parcel, substantially more inclusionary housing will be produced under the existing zoning than the proposed new zoning, an anomaly arising from OP’s decision to expand the development envelope while greatly increasing the allowable non-residential FAR.

Consider the “Home Plate Lot,” in Square 1660, along Western Avenue. This site is currently zoned MU-7B, which allows a total FAR of 4.8 (4.0 plus a 20% IZ bonus density), with at most 2.5

non-residential. The proposal is to upzone this to MU-10/FHM, which allows a total FAR of 7.8 with at most 6.0 non-residential.

If the site is developed to the maximum density allowed under current or proposed zoning, the affordable housing set-aside under current zoning, with IZ, can be significantly higher than the affordable housing set-aside with the proposed zoning and IZ-Plus, even though the building with the proposed zoning would be 62.5% larger than the building under current zoning.

Current Zoning: If developed to the maximum zoning envelope, the total development can be 301,752 SF, of which at most 157,163 could be non-residential.

Requirement: With the IZ requirement, and concrete and steel construction, the required set-aside is the greater of 8% of the residential gross floor area or 50% of the bonus density utilized plus any requirement based on habitable penthouse space. [Zoning Regulations, C§1003.2]

Calculation: The IZ set-aside requirement would be 25,146 SF for a concrete and steel project that utilizes the entire allowable density.

There would have a total floor area of 301,752, with a residential component of 144,590 to 301,752. The utilized bonus density would be 50,292, the difference between an FAR of 4.0 and 4.8.

If concrete and steel construction for the majority of housing units, the IZ requirement based on utilized bonus density (50% of utilized bonus density) exceeds 8% of the residential floor area, so the requirement is 25,146 plus any requirement based on habitable penthouse space.

If stick construction is used for most of the residential units, there is a higher IZ requirement: the greater of 10% of the residential gross floor area or 75% if the utilized bonus density. In this case, the IZ set-aside requirement would be 37,719 SF.

Proposed Zoning: With the proposed map amendment, if the project utilizes the entire zoning envelope, it would have a FAR of 7.8, a 95% increase over the baseline maximum density for MU-7B (an FAR of 4.0).

Requirement: For concrete and steel construction, the IZ Plus set-aside requirement with a 95% increase in total FAR utilized as defined in C§1003.5(b) is 14% of residential floor area. [Zoning Regulations, C§1003.4] plus any requirement based on habitable penthouse space.

Calculation: For a project that maximizes the entire zoning envelope with the new zoning, the IZ-Plus requirement would be 14% of the residential floor area, and if the developer maximizes the amount of non-residential space, including for example a hotel or medical office building, there would be 377,190 SF of non-residential space and 113,157 SF of residential space, of which 15,842 SF will be set-aside for inclusionary zoning units.

This is illustrated in the table below.

Home Plate Lot, Square 1660 on Western Avenue

Affordable Housing with Current and Proposed Zoning

	Current Zoning	Proposed
Zone	MU-7B	MU-10/FHM
Land Area	62,865	62,865
Maximum FAR Total	4.8 (4.0 + 20% IZ Bonus)	7.8
Maximum FAR Non-Res.	2.5	6.0
Maximum Total SF	301,752	490,147
Maximum Non-Res. SF	157,163	377,190
Res SF if Non-Res Maxed out	144,590	113,157
IZ Set-aside if majority of units are Concrete and Steel	25,146 SF 50% of utilized bonus density	
IZ Set-aside if majority of units are Stick	37,719 SF 75% of utilized bonus density	
IZ-Plus Set-aside under proposed zoning, with 6.0 FAR non-residential		15,842 SF 14% of residential floor area

2. The DDOT Report

The Transportation Analysis in DDOT Report (ZC 25-13, Exhibit 126 November 26, 2025) is fatally flawed and does not provide the Zoning Commission and the Office of Planning with the information they need to evaluate whether the existing infrastructure (with possible improvements) can support future development that would be matter-of-right if these amendments are approved.

The DDOT Report does not include:

(1) an evaluation of existing conditions, which should include existing development in the area, traffic counts for critical intersections and a review of the level of service for critical intersections;

(2) projections of additional trips (from existing conditions) and projected levels of service, assuming a full buildout in the area to current zoning limits; and

(3) projections of additional trips (from existing conditions) and projected levels of service assuming a full buildout in the area if the proposed amendments are adopted.

The Report should also include sufficient detail, such as block-by-block data on assumed development, units, residents, employees, and trip generation, for each of these three scenarios so that the community can review the analysis. For the analysis of existing conditions, and calculating the additional development in the buildout scenarios, currently unoccupied buildings should be assumed to be generating no trips. For currently unoccupied buildings, additional trips for the other two scenarios would be the total number of trips generated with the full buildout of those sites.

About 20 years ago, 2003 through 2005, OP had proposed major upzoning along upper Wisconsin Avenue, the Upper Wisconsin Avenue Corridor Study, UWACS. The proposed upzoning was modest compared with what is being considered today. Kathy Patterson, the Ward 3 Councilmember, requested infrastructure studies to determine whether the infrastructure supported the proposed development, or could be upgraded to support it. In response to Councilmember Patterson's request, DDOT conducted two transportation studies, the 2003 Friendship Heights Transportation Study, FHTS, (and 2005 FHTS Addendum) and the 2005 Wisconsin Avenue Corridor Transportation Study, WACTS, to evaluate the adequacy of the infrastructure to support the Office of Planning's recommended upzoning along Wisconsin Avenue. Those studies included an examination of existing conditions in the study area along with a projection of future conditions in several scenarios, including a full buildout of the corridor to the density limits under then existing zoning and a full buildout of the corridor to the density limits under the proposed zoning. They evaluated the current levels of service at critical intersections, along with the projected conditions under the two buildout scenarios.

The DDOT Report for the proposed Wisconsin Avenue zoning changes does not evaluate current conditions, and does not look at the additional development (from the existing development) that could occur if the text and map amendments are adopted. Instead, it only gives information on the difference between potential development in the study area with current zoning and potential development in the study area with the proposed text and map amendment.

DDOT states that the maximum development at a matter of right with current zoning would allow for 3,761 multi-family dwellings (MDUs) and 863,000 SF of retail, while a full buildout with the proposed zoning would allow for 9,562 MDUs and 863,000 SF of retail. (Table 1, p. 4 of DDOT Report). So, DDOT examined additional traffic that would be generated by the difference, 5,801 MDUs.

However, looking at sites in Squares 1580, 1657 and 1660 that are currently vacant, plus the Western Bus Garage in Square 1657, there could be over 4 million square feet of development with MU-10/FHM zoning, on those sites. In addition, in Tenleytown, on the Whole Foods block, Square 1770, there could be over 860,000 SF of development. Plus, there are a

number of projects approved or under construction and not yet occupied (for example, Federal Realty with 310 apartments plus retail, UIP with 146 apartments plus retail, FOX5 with 214 apartments, and the Residences of Mazza, with 325 apartments which recently began renting) that need to be considered in determining whether there is sufficient infrastructure, as well as a significant amount of new development on other sites being upzoned, such as the entire Wisconsin Avenue Mixed Use Zone, being upzoned to an FAR of 5.4 from zones with significantly lower limits, largely from MU-4, with a maximum FAR of 3.0 with IZ.

Since the corridor is not currently built out to the maximum allowed with current zoning, and on many blocks nowhere near that limit, this comparison does nothing to inform the Commission about whether the infrastructure can support the development that can occur with the proposed text and map amendments.

An analysis of the impact of 5,801 new apartments is not sufficient, when the proposed upzoning would allow an additional 4 million square feet of mixed-use development north of Harrison Street and west of Wisconsin, and with just FOX5, Federal Realty (5333 Wisconsin), and UIP, there are 670 additional new apartments under construction or with a PUD approved.

In the FHTS and the WACTS, DDOT also provided detailed information on the basis for their estimates, including their block-by-block assumptions about existing development and the potential development under current and proposed zoning. That information is essential so that the community can review the report. In the FHTS and WACTS, the detailed information allowed the community to comment on the report and correct serious inaccuracies in the original draft.

Other Necessary Infrastructure Analysis

As mentioned by others, OP has not provided other necessary infrastructure analysis, or plans on how to provide necessary services for this large increase in homes and businesses in the area. Again, this would need to be based on a comparison with existing development, not the maximum that would be allowed with current zoning, and it also would need to take into account that buildings currently vacant or under construction, like UIP, FOX5, Lord & Taylor, etc., are not currently using any of the existing infrastructure, including transportation, water and sewer, parks and schools.

The Proposed Heights and Densities are out of scale with the area

According to the Comprehensive Plan, “The 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.” The Friendship Heights commercial area is surrounded by a neighborhood of predominantly two-store single family homes. Heights of 130 feet plus a penthouse and downtown FAR limits are not appropriate for this area.

Conclusion

The proposed map and text amendments as submitted to the Zoning Commission are premature. The increase in height (130 feet plus a 20 foot penthouse) and density (an FAR of 7.8 with at most 6.0 non-residential) in Friendship Heights is far out of proportion to the scale of the surrounding neighborhood, a stable middle-class neighborhood of predominantly two-story detached and semi-detached single-family homes.

The language for the treatment of the Inclusionary Zoning requirement is insufficient to unambiguously require the set-aside anticipated in the various presentations on the map and text amendments. And even if the language is corrected, the amount of affordable housing and the depth of affordability is trivial compared with the value of the increase in the zoning envelope.

The DDOT Transportation Analysis is fatally flawed inasmuch as it fails to compare the proposed zoning envelope with existing conditions, but instead compares the maximum development that would be allowed with current zoning to the proposed zoning envelope. This comparison is of no use to the Zoning Commission in determining the likely impact of the Commission's decision. And there were no other serious infrastructure studies or plans to support the proposed upzoning.

For these reasons, the proposed text and map amendments are premature and should be sent back to the Office of Planning for significantly more planning, and considered only after full infrastructure analysis has been completed and the other concerns have been addressed.