



Ward 3 Housing Justice

ORGANIZING FOR EQUITABLE HOUSING IN WARD 3

ward3housingjustice@gmail.com

December 10, 2025

Mr. Anthony J. Hood, Chairman
DC Zoning Commission
One Judiciary Square
441 4th Street NW, 2nd Floor
Washington, DC 20001

Subject: 2025.1211 Ward 3 Housing Justice Testimony in opposition to **ZC Case No. 25-13 Text and Map Amendments to Create New Wisconsin Avenue Mixed Use Zones**

Dear Chairman Hood and Members of the Commission:

I am Gail Sonnemann speaking on behalf of the grassroots organization Ward 3 Housing Justice. I have lived in DC for 47 years, with 20 in Ward 3 on Brandywine Street NW adjacent to Tenleytown.

Ward 3 Housing Justice (W3HJ) opposes the proposed rezoning plans for the Wisconsin Avenue corridors until they are modified to provide an equitable amount of affordable housing commensurate with the height and density increases granted.

To be clear, Ward 3 Housing Justice members are not opposed to growth or prosperity. We just want growth and prosperity for everyone, not just land owners and developers. We want a community where our bus drivers, medical office staffers, preschool teachers, library staff, retail workers, lifeguards, pharmacy technicians, folks living on fixed incomes and our own adult children can live if they choose to.

IZ+ was created in 2011 -- 14 years ago, before civic leaders envisioned building height and density increases at 125% or more. Now, however, OP proposes upzoning to increasing height and density at twice that level – and beyond, but without commensurate increases in the set-asides for affordable housing. If density and height allowances can be increased, shouldn't affordable housing set-asides be increased too? W3HJ urges two updates to IZ+ specifically in these Ward 3 zones: 1) to keep affordable housing a commensurate percentage of the **full** height and density increases (not capped at 125%), and 2) to broaden access to these units to **lower income eligibility** tiers for IZ+ renters in these Ward 3 zones. Specifically, target and limit

eligibility for these IZ+ units in Ward 3 to households earning between 30%-60% of the DC Median Family Income (MFI).

We know that the developer class will cry out that they cannot possibly make developments ‘pencil out’ with even the existing levels of set-asides, but what this really means is that they choose not to do projects that do not meet their goals for what they call their ‘highest and best use’, which to them means huge profits and the ability to pay back their investors in as little as four years.

These new zones represent an incredible gift to developers. There is no compelling reason why IZ+ should be eroded or capped. Neither is there a justification for waiving IZ+ for any developer in these zones, including WMATA. Instead, each developer should provide a commensurate amount of affordable housing for all zoning increases, with no caps or exclusions or negotiation. If community members will no longer have a voice in development decisions because all development in these zones will be Matter-of-Right, then IZ+ requirements must be upheld now at the full percentage increases.

If you walk through Friendship Heights now, you will see different communities depending on the hour. During the day, you will see the street filled with a beautiful mix of people heading to their jobs, out to grab lunch or coffee, running to get the bus. But Friendship Heights is like the sunset towns of old – at the close of business, the neighborhood becomes overwhelmingly white because the people who work here, and who make the neighborhood come to life during business hours, the ‘should-be community,’ cannot afford to live here, even if they would like to.

Another thing you would see on your walk-through Friendship Heights is a series of full-sized front windows at the Pepco Station telling the shameful history of the destruction of a Black community at Fort Reno through the use of eminent domain to build the whites-only Deal Middle School. In fact, a lot of attention has been paid in the past few years to Ward 3’s exclusions of the past, whether at Fort Reno or through redlining, exclusionary zoning or other strategies. Approving these new zones without updating IZ+ requirements for Ward 3 will one day count as yet another exclusionary land use strategy because it fails to increase equitable access for District residents of modest means to live here. Yes, that would be exclusionary. W3HJ doesn’t want to stand for exclusion, and neither should the Zoning Commission.

Thank you,
Gail Sonnemann

Testimony submitted on behalf of Ward 3 Housing Justice (ward3housingjustice@gmail.com)
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