

Quotes from Zoning Commission RE ZC 25-13 at Setdown Meeting July 31, 2025

RE Need for more information on proposed Text Amendment/progression from Development Framework

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COMMISSIONER WRIGHT: Thank you. So, at the outset, let me just say that I am fully in support of the Comp Plan's goal of increasing density along major corridors, including Connecticut Avenue and Wisconsin Avenue, particularly near Metro stations like Tenleytown and Friendship Heights. One of the things that I think is important, however, for this Commission is to sort of be brought along on what the thinking and the work . . .
p. 67 . . . has been subsequent to the approval of the Comp Plan.

So, in this case, several references are made to the Wisconsin Avenue Development Framework, which was released by OP in February of 2024. When we talked about the Cleveland Park text amendment several weeks ago, we also talked about the fact that there were Connecticut Avenue Development Guidelines that also had been developed by the Office of Planning. And in both cases there was community outreach and a lot of good work done.

One of the things that I think would be very helpful would be prior to -- I think we should set this for a public hearing -- I'm definitely in favor of that -- but prior to the public hearing, I think there should be a briefing by the Office of Planning in open session during a regular Zoning Commission meeting that goes into detail about the Connecticut Avenue Development Guidelines and the Wisconsin Avenue Development Framework, because, although it has been completed by the Office of Planning, I -- my understanding is that there hasn't been a presentation to this body about those two finalized documents. Is that accurate? Maybe -- Joel, maybe you know. Has there been a presentation?

MR. LAWSON: Hi, everybody. Joel Lawson with the Office of Planning. Not that I'm aware of. Yeah, once again, you know, that's kind of what we're doing right now; we're presenting the zoning, which is responding to those documents, but we'd certainly be happy to go over those documents in more . . .
p. 68 . . . information -- in more detail.

COMMISSIONER WRIGHT: That would be really helpful. I really think that a briefing on those documents, which, indeed, are the basis for the text amendments, would be very, very helpful, so that we can really be brought along and understand that interim step that has taken place in developing these text amendments.

The other aspect of it is, there are a lot of guidelines that were included in both the Framework and in the Connecticut Avenue Development Guidelines. I would like to understand a presentation on how you feel these text amendments are, for lack of a better word, sort of like form-based codes, really trying to take the physical guidelines in the Framework and in the Guidelines -- Connecticut Avenue Development Guidelines and Wisconsin Avenue Development Framework and how you're trying to implement these building form goals through the text amendments, and whether you have analyzed whether the portions of the text amendments that talk about guidelines for setbacks, for example, how doable are those, given different types of building forms.

So, for example, in a stick-built project on top of, you know, a base -- a concrete base, there may be more abilities to do stepback or less ability to do stepback, given the actual construction type. In some of these, where you're recommending higher heights, like 110 feet, you may be talking about a different construction type. It may be concrete or steel, in . . .

p. 69 . . . which case there may be additional ways of doing setbacks that are -- you know, are more nuanced. I think the folks in the urban design staff of the Office of Planning should, you know, be able to give us a sort analysis of in the Framework, in the Guidelines, when there's a discussion about setbacks and stepbacks, how

will that work with different construction types, because we may recommend certain setbacks and then the project will come forward, or maybe not even come forward to us; it'll be a by-right project and they will say, "Well, we can't do that, because of the construction type".

And so I want to just understand a little bit more about how -- as these text amendments go forward, you know, how they are or are not sort of like form-based codes and, you know, an analysis of that. I mean, there certainly are elements of what you've presented that are like form-based codes, no question about it, but I think there needs to be a more detailed and sort of nuanced discussion. And in order to do that, I think, first, at least for me, I really need to understand the Wisconsin Avenue Development Framework that was created by OZ with lots of good community outreach. You know, I know -- I know that was the case. And the -- and the same thing is true for the Connecticut Avenue Development Guidelines, you know, just to understand better that interim step that has taken place and that has informed the text amendments that we will be considering. So those are my comments. Again, I absolutely, absolutely support . . .

p. 70 . . . the idea of increasing density along these two development corridors; I support, especially around Metro stations, having additional density, and I think that those are important goals of the Comp Plan that need to be implemented as part of the zoning code, no question. I just want to make sure we are fully understanding each sort of step that is informing these text amendments. That's my comment. Otherwise, I -- again, I support setting this down, but I feel like I need more information, preferably prior to the public hearing.

RE Proposed Affordable Housing Requirements

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Vice Chair Miller: I think I need to understand -- whether it's a briefing, if we get this briefing that Commissioner Wright has requested prior to having a public hearing, or at the -- at a public hearing, I think I need to understand more -- you don't necessarily have to answer today, unless you have a quick answer -- understand what the housing requirement is and the affordable housing requirement is.

You have all these text amendments; you have -- you have map amendments for a lot of squares. The map amendments increase height and density in these squares from current zoning. Is the 20 percent inclusionary zoning going to apply to these map amendments, or is it some higher amounts? Is the whole purpose of this is to encourage more housing, including especially affordable housing in these particular corridors? So I don't . . .

p. 72 . . . know if you have a brief answer. I just -- I don't know -- I just need to understand what the affordable -- what the housing requirement will be. Will there be a housing requirement? Could somebody do an office building, if it's -- instead of -- not that that's -- there's a market for that these days. But is there a housing requirement; is there an affordable housing requirement in any of these mixed-use specific neighborhood zones along each corridor? Well, we're talking about the Wisconsin Avenue Corridor right now, so that's where I wanted to ask. And I think if -- the slides that you presented, Ms. Thomas, that had the conceptual renderings that showed the design setbacks for each of the different zones was helpful. I guess I need to go back and read the Wisconsin Avenue Development Framework, which we may get a briefing on, to see if there are illustrative renderings as well that just show the relationship and the context and the perspectives of these much denser, taller buildings adjacent to the lower-density, and how, with what you're proposing, will be -- there will be this transition to the lower-density residential neighborhoods that exist currently.

RE How an area is chosen for OP "planning activities" (Small Area Plans, Development Guidelines, etc.)

p. 75 line 6 This -- what we're doing now, Wisconsin Avenue, and the one we previously did on Connecticut Avenue, this was put into the Comprehensive Plan by the Council members, and so it -- and then they put money towards the planning initiatives that they wanted OP to follow up on, so that's why these two particular came through. But we have also done one recently, as in the last two years, Pennsylvania Avenue East; I think that's in Ward 7. That was also the result of a planning initiative followed by a zoning initiative. So the planning initiative usually comes from the Comp Plan. The Comp Plan usually identifies and the Council usually follows up with dedicated funds or direction, and the Small Area Plan or the Framework Plan will identify whether there should be land use changes and whether there should be zoning initiatives. So we did a small area framework analysis in Ivy City, but it did not call for any significant zoning changes, except for along the industrial land, and those are going to be looked at as part . . .

p. 76 . . . of the larger industrial land study that's being completed, and then also part of the New York Avenue Corridor work that's being done. So that particular area overlaps two other major planning initiatives that are looking at that industrial land there.

CHAIRPERSON HOOD: Okay.

MS. STEINGASSER: But that's how they -- that's how they get there, and that's how the work is assigned to OP, and that's how these two have ended up in front of the Commission.

CHAIRPERSON HOOD: Okay. Because I know that -- you mentioned Ivy City. I know that I think there needs to be a plan on New York Avenue. I don't know what the plan is. That's not - my expertise. That's more of Commissioner Wright's expertise. And, also, I know that Ivy City has been trying to figure out how to do a plan. I'm just asking that the Office of Planning, or however this is done, maybe explain how they can get some of these new zones, and we might not be all the way up to par with everyone else, but I think at some point in time, we need to listen to the -- because that's how you -- we got here. Didn't we -- as you mentioned, Ms. Steingasser, the community talked to, what, the Council or did they talk to the Office of Planning and then they put money behind it; is that how that works?

MS. STEINGASSER: Well, in this case, that's how these two studies came to be, the Framework study and the Small Area Plan. They -- the councilmember put them into the Comprehensive Plan and then funded the work.

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CHAIRPERSON HOOD: Oh, okay. So you start with the Council. And I'm saying this for the record, so people will understand, because I really don't know how this starts. I know that -- I know when I was on the Comp Plan, we -- the community got together, we put something down, and that initiative -- just like our architect, we told the architect -- you tell the architect what you want, they go back and design it; you tell the Office of Planning what you want as a community, they go back and come back with the language to help you get there, and I guess it was approved by the Office of Planning -- I mean, by the City Council to put money behind it to be able to carry out the initiative. Is that a fair assessment?

MS. STEINGASSER: That is -- that is one way. I mean, we do -- OP tries to have a broader focus and look at elements of the Comprehensive Plan that apply citywide and make sure that there is more of an equity balance, in terms of our work in general. So we -- like, we've done some work out on Benning Road; we've done some work, obviously, over in Poplar Point; we've -- you know, we are -- we are -- we're citywide, and our focus is one of equitable investment of our time and resources.

CHAIRPERSON HOOD: Well, that's all I'm looking for. But, Ms. Schellin, I'm going to ask that you could remind me -- and we probably did -- I do remember doing Saint Elizabeth's and I do remember doing some things over there with form codes and all that. I remember that. But I also want what Ms. Steingasser . . .

p. 78 . . . mentioned about Anacostia. I don't remember that one I don't think. I do remember doing some work in Anacostia, but I didn't know if we did a new zone because of the historical nature of it, but I'd like to have a copy of that order. I'd like to read that and -- so I can -- we can pass that on to people who are interested.

MS. STEINGASSER: I don't want to -- no, we did not create a special zone for Anacostia. What we -- what we did was we looked at Anacostia in terms of affordable housing and inclusionary zoning, and we gave it -- we gave it a similar analysis of its historic district and ability to provide and balance out its affordable housing requirements. So the Mayor's Equity -- Housing Equity Report, which talks about -- sets goals for different parts of the city, different housing goals, different affordability goals, they also called out the different planning areas of the city.

RE How people are notified about the proposed plans and zoning changes

CHAIRPERSON HOOD: Okay. And then my last question is, when people are being notified about this -- it kind of goes along with what Commissioner Wright said -- do we send it to just property owners -- and I think our regulations now -- well, our regulations say that we send it to tenants -- tenant owners as well. Is that -- is that true? Maybe I'll ask my legal counsel about that -- about what is sent to the tenants.

MS. STEINGASSER: The planning process is different than the zoning process, right?

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CHAIRPERSON HOOD: Right.

MS. STEINGASSER: The planning -- you know, we don't have a Planning Commission, so planning is done through the Mayor's Office. She's the Chief Planner under the Home Rule Act.

CHAIRPERSON HOOD: Right.

MS. STEINGASSER: And, through her, the Office of Planning acts as the Executive's planning agency. They immediately contact the ANCs. We have a huge database of civic groups and community organizations. We know -- you know, we know there's groups that are citywide in their focus, so we do -- we do a very broad net to focus on -- you know, depending on where the geography is, on how we notify people. We put -- we -- you know, we do some old-school stuff, you know, little posters in the library, we notify churches; you know, we really -- we really try to do a broad -- I mean, at one point with the Comp Plan, I think they did side panels on the buses. You know, they really try to do a very broad net, in terms of notifying what the planning initiatives are and how the neighborhood planners and the citywide planners are reaching out, and same with our Urban Design Division.

CHAIRPERSON HOOD: Okay.

MS. STEINGASSER: You know, they work together and try to notify through all kinds of ways.