

Comments on DC Zoning Commission Case 25-13 – Office of Planning’s Third Supplemental Report

Thank you for reopening the record in Case 25-13 in order for the public to comment on the third supplemental report from the Office of Planning (OP).

Public comments to date have expressed concern that the proposed upzoning changes would permit future buildings and alterations to existing buildings to be approved without providing residents/citizens as well as OP, the ZC, the ANCs an opportunity to review and comment. In response, OP proposed a design review by the ZC. In the third iteration of its report, OP has again limited design review requirement.

Limiting citizen/resident input is a bad idea and undemocratic. All new development of the fifty lots affected by this case, regardless of size, should be subject to citizen review. If there are properties listed in the DC Inventory of Historic Sites, or eligible for listing, there should be additional review by DCHPO and HPRB in addition to that of OP and ZC.

In the forty years I have lived in Friendship Heights I have seen a good many changes along Wisconsin Avenue. What was once a vibrant neighborhood avenue with small businesses, movie theaters, and restaurants has become a canyon with large buildings charging rents that most small businesses can’t afford. My block, three blocks east of Wisconsin Avenue was used by other Ward 3 residents as a parking lot for metro which was in its early days. People parked on my block at holiday time to walk to Lord & Taylor, Woodward & Lothrop (in MD), movie theaters and restaurants.

As more people worked from home and shopped on line what was once a ‘vibrant’ neighborhood quieted, Lord & Taylor and Woodies and a number of small businesses/shops closed. Habits and living patterns changed. Large chain establishments occupied the street level of new taller buildings. Since covid and the reduction in the federal workforce even many of those businesses have closed.

Before one even gets to the question of affordable housing and the particular demographic it might benefit, there are legitimate concerns about how much development will be beneficial along the Wisconsin Avenue corridor. Most developers think their project is the one that will succeed but at present there are several development projects along the avenue that are stalled.

Creating zoning that extends matter of right development along the corridor just doesn’t make for good urban planning. It creates expectations on the part of property owners and developers that, should conditions, especially economic ones, change (and there is ample evidence that they will) are then hard to repeal. Meanwhile the surrounding community suffers.

I ask you, Zoning Commissioners, to consider the very real downside that the proposed changes to review and oversight by citizens and various government entities will have, and to restore a full and open to all review of proposed development of the all lots regardless of size, included in the current proposal.

Thank you for your consideration.

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