NW Opportunity Partners CDC

Expanding affordable housing and economic opportunities in NW DC

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Testimony at the Roundtable
Zoning Commission's Current Racial Equity Tool
October 26, 2026

Good afternoon. I am Meg Maguire, chair of NW Opportunity Partners CDC, an organization advocating for expanding affordable housing and economic opportunities in Ward 3.

First, since 2022 the Office of Planning (OP) and the Zoning Commission (ZC) have selectively applied a racial equity tool to individual development projects but not to up-zonings on major corridors such as WI Ave. and CT Ave.

Instead of requiring deeper affordability, opportunities for home ownership or family-sized units as a condition of development, OP recommended and the ZC accepted, a massive matter-of-right upzoning without seriously considering racial equity or requiring advancement of long-held city goals. While we appreciate your concern for urban design issues along these corridors, what you finally adopted does virtually nothing *to acknowledge the effects of past racial exclusion in Ward 3 or to address the current challenges of income exclusion that disproportionately affect people of color.*

Second, a racial equity tool can easily become performative –a checklist that planners, commissioners and developers apply but does not result in meaningful changes to projects. Fortunately, since its inception, the Council Office of Racial Equity (CORE) has distinguished itself with thorough and insightful racial equity analysis. While Council has exempted emergency legislation, thus seriously weakening the potential to impact legislation, CORE has nonetheless been a beacon of racial equity truth-telling. Can the Zoning Commission claim the same based on four years of project data? Have you systematically evaluated this racial

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equity tool's use and what did you learn? Were any projects made more racially equitable through relocation/design/level of affordability/displacement mitigation?

Third, the current tool focuses on displacement of residents but not businesses. Future development along WI Ave. will not result in substantial direct residential displacement – though it will negatively impact the quality of life of adjacent communities with endless construction and no community benefits. But future development along this corridor will negatively impact small businesses, many of which are either Black owned or staffed with minimum wage earners. Developers should have been required to assess their projects for small business displacement, produce a relocation plan, and offer an enforceable opportunity to come back when the project is complete.

Fourth, project sponsors seeking upzoning should be required to report contributions to the public good based on established racial equity policy goals such as

- Increase in home ownership
- Family housing of 3+ bedrooms
- Location of truly affordable housing projects in deficient areas of the city
- Benefits for income groups earning too little to qualify for IZ
- New forms of housing and finance such as social housing
- Environmental sustainability measures beyond building requirements

However, it is too late for any public good requirement along Ward 3's upzoned corridors because, with matter-of-right, *you have given developers a pass on racial equity/mitigation and exempted the community from negotiating community benefit agreements.* There is literally no process to represent the interests of those who continue to be denied a stake in our community: grocery workers, childcare workers, health care aids, store clerks and many others who work in Ward 3 but have no realistic opportunity of living here. This was and is a big mistake.

Finally, there is an inherent conflict of interest when the project sponsor is also the racial equity analyst. Have you considered requiring that sponsors of large-scale projects *contract with CORE to examine their proposals*? If the Office of Planning also contracted with CORE to conduct racial equity analyses before coming to the Zoning Commission for any corridor upzoning, you would have much better and more objective information about impacts than you are now receiving. Yes, this will cost money and potentially new legislation to make CORE's services available on

contract, but at least the public would have confidence that the best analysts in the city have impartially studied the effects of their proposals.

The Zoning Commission is empowered to make the best decisions for racial equity in development projects. We the public need confidence that, as the city grows and changes, you will give highest priority to ensuring a just and equitable place to live, work and become invested in the future.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify.

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