Ward 3 Housing Justice

ORGANIZING FOR EQUITABLE HOUSING IN WARD 3

Testimony before the Zoning Commission
26-RE
October 26, 2026

Good afternoon, I'm Margaret Dwyer testifying on behalf of Ward 3 Housing Justice, a grassroots organization affiliated with Empower DC dedicated to creating more low income housing in Ward 3.

Our request is simple: Please use a strengthened racial equity lens to view development and density applications as leverage to enhance the opportunities for Black and Brown households to remain in or to access every neighborhood across the city.

The Racial Equity tool should guide the Zoning Commission to consider the full range of racial disparities that exist in DC and use your authority to lessen these inequities. Responding to inequities is not one size fits all. Rather, you can require that more robust racial equity data be provided by the Office of Planning to inform the type and level of inequities that exist and tailor effective responses to each context.

In addition to racial equity data, minimum standards for community engagement should be set and enforced. In cases in neighborhoods where historic displacement has occurred, meaningful engagement with members of the displaced community needs to occur. If these standards are not met, the commission should refuse to hear the project.

Buttressed by adequate data, meaningful community engagement and an effective racial equity tool, you have the power to require every applicant to incorporate measures into their project that further racial equity, prevent displacement and repair past harms. These could include family-sized units, deeper affordability, affirmative marketing to voucher holders, or community benefits agreements that support community-identified racial equity enhancing initiatives.

Finally, corridor rezonings are opportunities that go beyond aligning the Comp Plan and zoning regulations. They provide leverage to prevent displacement, repair past harms and require meaningful plans for affordability. We urge you to seize these opportunities. We recently participated in cases 25-09 and 25-13 which provided major upzoning and wealth-building opportunities on Wisconsin and Connecticut Avenues but failed to include any provision for households living below 50% MFI, which is the majority of the Black community. This was more than a missed opportunity; it was a reinforcement of the inequitable status quo. Maybe a meaningful racial equity tool could have prevented this failure.

ZONING COMMISSION
District of Columbia
CASE NO. 26-RE
EXHIBIT NO. 7