Good morning, Chair and Members of the Commission.

My name is Melodie Marsh. I am a proud graduate of Howard University and a Youth Health Advocate representing Young, Gifted and Green, a non-profit organization dedicated to environmental justice, public health, and racial equity across the District.

I am testifying today on BZA/ZC Case No. 26-RE. In our work alongside District residents, we see daily how land use, zoning decisions, and real estate development directly impact health disparities, housing stability, and environmental equity. To ensure that development in D.C. serves all residents—particularly historically marginalized communities—we urge the Zoning Commission and the Board of Zoning Adjustment to adopt and enforce the following essential standards:

1. Require Complete Transparency in Evaluation Tools

We urge the Commission to require that evaluation tools and equity checklists be completed and submitted as formal application forms. The public must be able to clearly see which questions have been answered, which remain unanswered, and how applicants justify their impact on surrounding neighborhoods.

2. Establish and Enforce Baseline Community Engagement Standards

The Commission must define clear, required community engagement standards as a baseline minimum acceptable from applicants before a project is reviewed. Meaningful engagement cannot be a simple box-checking exercise after plans are finalized. If an applicant fails to meet these rigorous standards, the Commission should refuse to hear the project.

3. Require Robust Racial Equity and Anti-Displacement Data

Decisions must be grounded in comprehensive data. We request that the Office of Planning provide robust racial equity data—specifically incorporating the Anti-Displacement Strategy required by the Comprehensive Plan, as well as a thorough housing gap analysis that details the critical shortage of housing accessible to low-income residents in D.C.

4. Protect Existing Tenants and Ensure Cooperative Relocation Plans

Where existing tenants are affected by proposed developments, the applicant must be required to demonstrate full compliance with tenants' rights laws. Furthermore, we must mandate a binding tenant relocation and return plan that has been crafted collaboratively and transparently with the affected residents.

5. Mandate Specific Racial Equity and Anti-Displacement Measures

Finally, every applicant should be required to incorporate explicit measures into their projects that advance racial equity and prevent displacement. These measures should include

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family-sized units, deeper levels of affordability, affirmative marketing to housing choice voucher holders, and enforceable Community Benefits Agreements that directly support community-identified racial equity initiatives.

Development in Washington, D.C. cannot come at the expense of our most vulnerable neighbors or our climate targets. By holding applicants to these standard of accountability, transparency, and equity, the Commission can ensure our land use decisions build a fair, healthy, and sustainable city for all.

Thank you for your time, your leadership, and your commitment to District residents.