Testimony
Zoning Commission Roundtable on Racial Equity Tool
October 26, 2026

Prepared by Justice and Witness Action Network-DC Team Potomac Association, United Church of Christ	Presented by Lauri Winter (DC resident) 5035 12th St NE Washington DC 20017 Cellphone: 904 859 4724

Introduction

My name is Lauri Winter. I live at 5035 12th St NE. I am speaking on behalf of the Washington, DC Team of the United Church of Christ Potomac Association Justice and Witness Action Network (JWAN-DC). This team is comprised of representatives from United Church of Christ congregations located in Washington, DC. As a community of faith, we are motivated by the call to address the needs of the "least of these" and require justice on their behalf. I am a DC resident of 10 years, bearing witness to the strengths and challenges facing this beloved city. I am particularly concerned about the disproportionate disparities in health and threats to Black and Brown communities, especially those without shelter or fighting to keep their homes.

We welcome this opportunity to provide input for the October, 26, 2026 Roundtable on the Racial Equity Tool. This Roundtable seeks specific assistance regarding 1) community outreach and engagement, 2) disaggregated race and ethnicity data, and 3) the commission's racial equity evaluation criteria. After reviewing the testimony we offered in 2022, we believe those statements apply to today's questions. I am providing a somewhat edited version of that statement.

As it stands, the tool requires the applicant/developer to provide a racial equity statement that will be analyzed in response to key questions. However, using only the generic questions proposed in the current tool does not reflect the requirements for the racial equity lens as explained in the Comprehensive Plan. A meaningful racial equity lens requires a tool that facilitates decision-making or provides guidance on whether a given proposal will actually make a difference for racial equity and housing justice. The criteria for advancing racial equity in our residential spaces must be applied not only by the Zoning Commission but also by the Office of Planning, linked to the Department of Housing and Community Development programming, and by any other city agencies accountable for housing equity.

Our primary reference is the Government Alliance on Race and Equity (GARE), an alliance of government entities whose mission is to achieve racial equity within their jurisdictions. (It is our understanding that DC is a member of this organization). GARE states that
"Racial equity tools provide a structure for institutionalizing the consideration of racial equity. A racial equity tool:
• proactively seeks to eliminate racial inequities and advance equity;
• identifies clear goals, objectives and measurable outcomes;
• engages community in decision-making processes;

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• identifies who will benefit or be burdened by a given decision, examines potential unintended consequences of a decision, and develops strategies to advance racial equity and mitigate unintended negative consequences; and,
• develops mechanisms for successful implementation and evaluation of impact." (*Racial Equity Toolkit: An Opportunity to Operationalize Equity*)

Proactively seeks to eliminate racial inequities and advance equity
The current housing stock clearly does not meet residents' needs. Black and Brown residents are disproportionately located in the most impoverished areas. The amount of housing needed to meet their needs is grossly underestimated. The tool needs to help correct the mismatch between income status and housing availability.

We need an ample supply of **deeply affordable** housing! Boston has a list of interventions that applicants must implement to proactively address displacement and advance racial equity before coming to the Zoning Commission for approval.

The DC Zoning Commission has the opportunity to make decisions with the **intentionality** of eliminating racial inequities. One way to strengthen this intentionality is to review and reorder the steps in the zoning process to make it more accessible and equitable, including enhancing notice requirements, providing more education and support for the public who wish to participate, and making case information more accessible and understandable. It cannot achieve the result in isolation from other departments and a citywide commitment to that goal, but its work is a **necessary**, if not sufficient, component of the change.

Identify clear goals, objectives, and measurable outcomes
The tool must go beyond the questions currently being asked. It is our assertion that measurable goals need to be established for the city as a whole and then segmented in a manner that would address the specific actions in given neighborhoods that would facilitate racial equity (e.g., increase in # of affordable units in one neighborhood, and protection from displacement of existing residents in another neighborhood). We encourage a tool that incentivizes creative solution-finding (e.g., developers converting commercial space into affordable housing and shelter or bridge housing for the unhoused). We also think that a tool can be transparently followed if it is established as a form so the public can see what questions have been answered or unanswered

The question of equity can explore how information about potential development is disseminated, opportunities for affected parties to provide input, and the breadth and depth of community voices. Equity includes analysis of protections against displacement and mitigation efforts for those who will experience displacement, including guarantees of financially reasonable return opportunities and adequate space for family size.

Engages community in decision-making process

The Commission needs to define required community engagement standards that provide a minimally acceptable baseline for the applicant. If these community engagement standards have not been met, the Commission should refuse to hear the project.

Intentional engagement of all parties in decision-making is critical. Families, businesses, community organizations, and faith communities that may be directly or indirectly impacted need to be part of the process. Some in wealthier areas may oppose affordable housing that brings greater racial diversity because of a "not in my backyard" mentality. And those who live in historically under-resourced communities often fear a higher risk of displacement. All parties need to engage in the dialogue to find creative ways to achieve citywide goals.

Identifies who will benefit or be burdened by a given decision, examines potential unintended consequences of a decision, and develops strategies to advance racial equity and mitigate unintended negative consequences

As noted above, identifying the impact of decisions matters. Consider the displacement risk of those who live within a mile of a given development rather than just 200 feet and may face increased tax rates. Consider the loss of community service organizations as rents rise due to both tax rates and market pressures. Consider the impact on the "sense of community " which maintains the informal norms that maintain safety in the "neighborhood." Destruction of the community fabric of informal norms contributes to community violence.

Develops mechanisms for successful implementation and evaluation of impact

The Commission needs to seek outside assistance, such as from the Council's Office of Racial Equity, to support racial equity evaluation from experts in the field and proactively request assistance from the incoming mayor to make racially equitable development outcomes possible through coordination across systems and agencies

Achievement of racial equity requires adequate data – both quantitative and qualitative. Data is needed as a baseline assessment of current status. Data is required to mark expectations to strive towards. Data is required to measure progress for goal setting and measurement of progress and accountability.

The evaluation measures must include process measures, such as including all relevant voices, including community residents, tenants, owners, neighbors, community organizations, and community businesses. Ideally, these entities and prospective developers would co-create the development plan. Evaluation measures would also track outcomes such as the number of people who returned to a space that was financially appropriate and adequate for family size. Measures could include documenting changes in the percentage of income devoted to housing and comparing those changes between people of color and whites.

Summary

We believe applying a racial equity lens to decisions must be done thoughtfully. The tool needs to

(1) include a clear definition of “racial equity” and community engagement standards as applicable in development decisions;
(2) use a framework that addresses the housing needs of the city as a whole, and segmented per neighborhood;
(3) engage communities in the process of decision-making, including those directly and indirectly impacted [not just at the proposed site]; and
(4) use quality data for goal setting and measurement of progress and accountability.

As noted above, other jurisdictions have developed strategies to meaningfully address racial justice and community engagement, each with its strengths and weaknesses. The DC Zoning Commission has the opportunity to refine its current tool and process to make it clear that DC is serious about racial equity.

Thank you for the opportunity to encourage you to pursue the role you can play in making a difference.