

Case number 14:18A, Brookland Manor

My name is Claire Cook and I am administrative organizer with ONE DC. I am also an adjunct professor of sociology at the George Washington University. I am here this evening to express my opposition to Mid-City Financial's 2nd stage PUD (14-18A) and to support Brookland Manor resident demands to preserve existing affordable housing.

I have been a resident of Washington, DC for 6 years. My graduate thesis at GW examined new-build gentrification in the neighborhood now known as NoMa, and how the development of luxury, market-rate housing in Northeast DC has resulted in direct and exclusionary displacement of low-income Black residents in the midst of DC's housing crisis. I have been engaged in organizing around the right to housing for the last 4 years.

I am here tonight to say that the development of more market-rate, luxury housing in DC is not sustainable. Over the last few decades, we have witnessed a major shift in DC demographics, as increasing numbers of young, mostly white & highly-educated people move to the city. However, the median income for DC millennials is only \$43,000 a year. As housing in DC becomes more and more unaffordable, wages remain stagnant & federal hiring freezes, will young professionals stay in DC? Can these young professionals being targeted afford DC even now?

In January 2016, Toby Bozzuto of The Bozzuto Group, a well-known DC developer, was quoted in a CNBC article as saying: "Every new building we built is so expensive — the land, construction, labor — that the rents we have to charge to make a feasible return are high. So to what degree are we creating a tranche of housing just for the elite, and at what point does housing become unaffordable? At what point does it become not sustainable to rent? I fear we may end up like that."

Even the developers in this city know we are creating housing for a small, wealthy elite. Even they know this is not sustainable urban planning. Equitable, smart communities require space for both young, childless adults and families, small or large. And when we build for our families, we need bedrooms. Members of the zoning commission, I ask you to consider, how many bedrooms does your family need? 3 bedrooms? 5? 7? Would you be willing to house your family in a 1 or 2 bedroom apartment? As you have heard testified tonight, low-income families especially rely on their extended family networks to survive and thrive – to provide transportation, childcare, elder care, & other support. Breaking up these strong familial & social networks, and splitting them into 1 and 2 bedroom units is a destructive, violent policy.

Additionally, destroying an existing community has long-term negative consequences on the health & well-being both of individuals and their communities. Dr. Mindy Fullilove of The New School found that like plants & flowers, people can experience “root shock” when they are displaced. She writes, “[Displacement] increases the risk of stress-related diseases like depression and heart attack, and the loss of social, emotional, and financial resources. At the community level, it means the loss of interpersonal ties and the "capital" -- social, cultural, political and emotional -- that is vested in the collective connections.”

For these reasons, as a low-income DC resident, as an urban sociologist, and as a community organizer, I urge the Zoning Commission to reject Mid-City’s proposal. I support the reasonable, equitable, & sustainable demands put forth by Brookland Manor residents to preserve all 535 units of affordable housing at current bedroom sizes and current affordability levels; the right for all tenants to remain on the property throughout redevelopment; and for current residents to be fully engaged in the planning process.

Thank you,
Claire Cook