

Written Testimony of Caitlin Kovalkoski

Zoning Case 17-17 (Square 5564, Lot 812, 1401 22nd Street SE)

In Support of Rezoning 1401 22nd Street SE from PDR-1 to RA-2

March 19, 2018

Chairman Hood and distinguished members of the Zoning Commission:

My name is Caitlin Kovalkoski, and I'm homeowner at 1419 ½ 22nd Street SE on the same block as the 1401 22nd Street SE. I am writing in support of the Office of Planning's recommendation to rezone 1401 22nd Street SE (site) from commercial (PDR-1) to residential (RA-2) not only for all the reasons that OP outlines in their report for this hearing (Exhibit 22), but also based on my own observations as a new resident of Fairlawn. In addition to this written statement, I will testify at the hearing on March 19, 2018 in support of the rezoning.

My boyfriend and I began house-hunting last spring with the intent to stay as close to Capitol Hill as possible for the sake of our commutes, as well as proximity to our friends and local restaurants we enjoy. We put offers on several homes within our budget, but were constantly out-bid by developers with all-cash offers. Frustrated by the bidding wars, we began to look east of the river, and we found a home in Fairlawn that checked many boxes – an easy commute to the congressional office buildings, a home with good bones that needed a bit of updating, a backyard to play fetch with our dog and barbeque, and most importantly, room to start a family in the coming years.

Moreover, we also loved the assets of the neighborhood. First, the mix of rowhouses, duplexes and detached homes make the neighborhood feel so residential that you almost forget that we are next to I-295. Homes in Fairlawn are spacious, most over 1200 square feet before basements, with no need for a storage unit in the neighborhood.

Second, having access to Anacostia Park is wonderful, because I enjoy spending free time running and cycling along the River Trail. I can tell any of my running friends that my house is just south of the pirate ship playground in the park, and they know exactly where that is. I'm thankful for the new ParkRun 5Ks that take place every Saturday morning and the new Capital Bikeshare's dock in the park, the first on National Park Service land that isn't on the National Mall, and as the Park Service celebrates 2018 as the

Year of the Anacostia, more and more Fairlawn neighbors and District residents are enjoying the multitude of activities offered in the park.

Finally, and maybe most importantly, District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS) is making a \$47 M investment in the new Orr Elementary School one block south of this site. The existing school is already over its stated 400-student capacity, where the new school will grow that capacity by over 60 students. I think this not only speaks to the growth that DCPS is predicting for future enrollment, but also reinforces the anticipated growth of the city outlined in the Comprehensive Plan.

All of these assets contribute to a great neighborhood, and I believe other individuals and families should also be given the opportunity to live in our neighborhood by rezoning this land to residential.

In my professional capacity, I have worked for three separate community development financial institutions, as well as a large financial services association. Everyone in this room knows the hard truth that I see every day at my job: DC has an affordable housing crisis. And if the city's population continues to grow at its projected rate, the affordability will only worsen when we have a fixed amount of land to develop and a fixed height restriction that will impact density. I view the lack of affordable housing in communities across the country as a market failure, and correcting market failures is one of the quintessential roles of government. I ask you to serve in your role tonight to support the Office of Planning's recommendation in favor of rezoning this site to residential. While it's true that rezoning this land to residential will be a drop in the bucket of what's needed to provide more housing options in DC and ease the affordability problem, it's a step in the right direction. Please prioritize people over profits.

I would like to end my written testimony by refuting several claims from the owner and counsel about the negative impacts of rezoning and by providing an account of the current state of affairs between the owners and the community. While I recognize that rezoning the site would not prohibit the proposed storage facility from being built under its current building permits, I believe there are a number of problems with the storage facility that should be considered as the Commission weighs this rezoning:

- **No community benefits, only profits:** When the BZA granted the owner a postponement of this hearing from February to tonight, it was under the guise of having an open dialogue to address the neighborhood's concerns and other burdens for an ownership group that has no presence in the District other than a shell LLC for the sake of legal transactions. At the meeting, counsel for the owner did the majority of the talking from their side, with the representative from the owner only speaking twice – once to introduce himself and once to say that the proposed

storage facility will benefit the community because the closest storage facility is 2 miles away. So what that tells me is that they see a profit to be made within that 2-mile radius, and that profit would be made on the backs of the residents of Fairlawn and other District residents served by both Anacostia Park and Orr Elementary School. They did not come to the meeting with any proactive offers for the community to consider, and if they were truly listening to the community, they would realize that building housing on that site is the only thing we are interested in.

- **Ward 8 Does Not Need Storage:** Furthermore, a pillar to their objection is based on two studies “Industrial Land in a Post-Industrial City” and “Ward 5 Works” that have little to no bearing on Ward 8, as we all know the stark economic contrasts of wards west and east of the Anacostia River. The claim that we must preserve industrial use is absurd when the lot has sat vacant for decades. Furthermore, the ownership points to 23 storage facilities across the District and to a lack of storage facilities in Ward 8. It’s a simple reason: homes in Ward 8 are spacious enough that we don’t have a market demand for storage. Out of all the neighborhoods in the District studied by NeighborhoodX in 2017, Anacostia is the most affordable at an average of \$222/square foot compared to Capitol Hill at \$588/square foot and Navy Yard at \$521/square foot. Ward 8 will not benefit from this, but rather Ward 6 across the river where homes are not as affordable and space comes at a premium. Why should our property values suffer to keep theirs inflated?
- **Not all traffic is equal:** At the community meeting and now in the objection to rezoning (Exhibit 33), the transportation consultant outlined the numbers of trips of vehicles would take from the site, similar to DDOT’s analysis in their report (Exhibit 20), although DDOT used a more reasonable figure of 40 units of housing compared to the consultant’s 50 units of housing. That difference of 10 units is significant though; DDOT points to less traffic under the proposed RA-2 than current PDR-1, while the consultant says more traffic under the proposed RA-2. Also, the transportation consultant admitted that one cannot compare sedans and other personal vehicles to moving trucks that would be frequented by the storage facility, which are more likely to cause damage and accidents on our residential streets. Further, the transportation consultant stated several times that they were only recently brought in and could not speak to the Loading Management Plan, which the community has pointed to time and time again as insufficient to deal with large moving trucks through a residential area with acute angle turns (See Exhibit A of Load Management Plan), in violation of many Public

Space Regulations (See ANC8A letter to DDOT's PublicSpace Commission on February 8, 2018), and does not offer any solution regarding moving trucks blocking the way of first responders should such needs arise.

- **Fictional financial loss to owner:** In the objection to the rezoning (Exhibit 33), counsel outlines the negative financial impact to owner in the event. Let us be clear. As of today, there is no storage facility on the site as construction is in the pre-development phase with soil boring, so any financial loss or negative impact is strictly fictional. If there's any impact, it's because the owner overpaid for the site. It was sold in 2016 for \$1.5 M (Exhibit 6) and then resold to its current owner for over \$4 M in 2017, while it is clear that the land without improvements is only worth approximately \$400,000.
- **Check on future use:** The most troubling piece in their objection is that rezoning would make the storage facility a non-conforming use leaving the owner "severely restricted from altering or extending the proposed self-storage facility." I can only guess that means ownership would lobby for additional lots nearby to be rezoned to commercial to expand their operation or change the intensity of commercial use for the site. The neighborhood would object to both.
- **Tax revenue for the District:** In the objection to the rezoning (Exhibit 33), counsel notes that rezoning this lot will mean a loss in tax revenue for the District. While commercial property is tax at a higher rate than residential, creating more housing through rezoning will not only create revenue for the District through property tax, but also revenue through income tax of residents that would live in the District, and other taxes from sales of goods and service to those residents.
- **Lack of due diligence by owner about community concerns:** Counsel also claimed that the owner had no knowledge of the neighborhood's established objection to the storage facility until after they purchased the site. I find it hard to believe that any investment group wouldn't have done its due diligence before investing over \$4 M on a piece of land that's worth approximately 10 percent of that (See Exhibit 6), but no investment is a safe investment, and they of all people should know that as an investment group. I believe that the owner could build multifamily housing on the site, but without the same return as the storage facility, which tends to be the most profitable commercial asset because its low overhead. Perhaps this is a lesson for them about doing that due diligence before buying land, and also a lesson on listening to community needs.