

**Testimony Opposing Proposed Development at M St and South Capitol
Zoning Commission
October 1, 2020**

Southwest Voice: The People's Paper

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I am here to testify on behalf of Southwest Voice: The People's Paper – an alternative news source and community group in the Southwest-Waterfront neighborhood that uniquely celebrates our community's rich heritage, diversity, and neighborly love. Our diverse Editorial Board is made up of SW parents, public housing residents, educators, racial minorities, LGBT, community leaders and social justice advocates. Our Board is over one-third public housing residents, intentionally created to reflect that Southwest is one-third public housing. We are overwhelmingly renters.

This proposal is a disrespectful, demonstrable example of vicious racism – as if our existence as human beings don't matter. Based on over ten years of data about the displacement of Black people in SW and citywide, we cannot but conclude that the attack on SW's social diversity is conscious and intentional in changing the makeup of our community. Let me quote a long-time SW resident and Board member, "They are trying to make Southwest for whites. We are nobody here." The data unequivocally show the social costs and consequences. Black people are taking the full brunt of what is happening in our community due to developments like this. There are fewer of us here than 10 years ago. Our power and ability to affect change have been severely curtailed. After all, this development is fully capable of moving forward based on current land use. Even the government is hard pressed to rein in developers who seek to do nothing but overrun our community with high-priced, single person housing that we don't need and cannot afford. Then again, the various government branches, in tandem with this Commission, have been complicit in perpetuating a racist system that consciously participates in our demise as a people and diverse community. We are yet again victimized as part of a centuries-old cycle of racial and economic exploitation. Until frank and honest discussions about racial equity occurs, we cannot even begin to rebound from the diminution of Black wealth accrual because wealth is power. Immeasurable damage to the social fabric and community autonomy have characterized Southwest in the last ten years. We will not sit by as idle spectators.

We speak in opposition to the M St and South Capitol project for the following reasons.

- 1) Given the overwhelming amount of market units that have been built or are currently in the pipeline, this project violates core tenets of the Comprehensive Plan Framework and the Southwest Small Area Plan by depriving SW of its social diversity preservation. The SW community and our ANC have consistently and vocally defended our rich diversity and desire to maintain our unique neighborhood character.

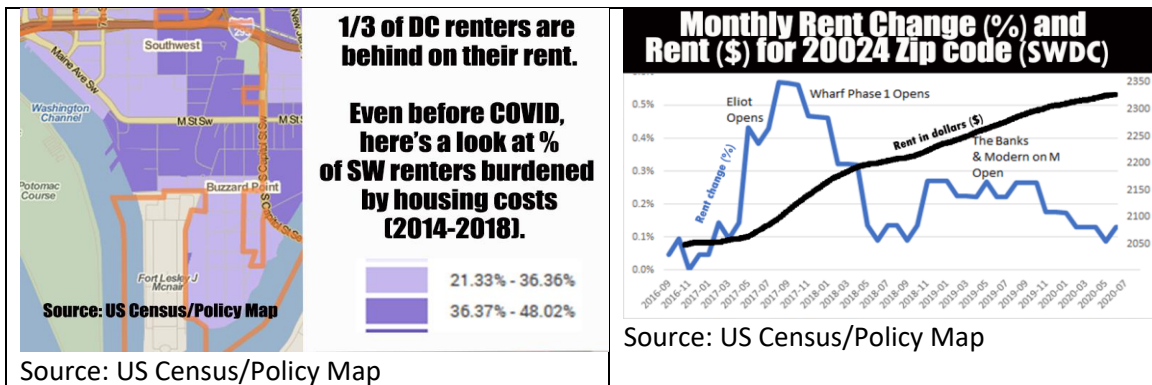
This project will significantly diminish social diversity. How do we know? Because this project resembles other overwhelming market unit developments that have permanently damaged social diversity in SW. Based on federal data from 2011-2018, Blacks in the 20024 zip code have declined in absolute numbers from 6,469 to 5,957, which is an 8% decrease, despite the

thousands of new units that have come online (US Census/Policy Map). Whites on the other hand have increased from 3,941 to 6,731, which translates to a 92% surge. The Zoning Commission has approved each and every one of new properties that have catalyzed a demographic shift in Southwest.

- 2) **This project will exacerbate the housing burden for renters.** As the Federal Reserve Bank of Philadelphia states, “luxury construction...will help ease housing costs in the higher end of the market but may do little for working-class residents (Source: [Philadelphia Federal Reserve Board](#)).” As indicated in census tracts in SW that have experienced the closest proximity of development (Tracts -200 and -1000), renters have increased housing costs burden based on two measures of rent burden and median renter costs (US Census/Policy Map).

Percentage of Renters Burdened by Housing Costs		
	Renters (Change from '09-'13)	Median Renter Costs Burden
2014-2018		
Census Tract (-200)*	33.27% ↑	25.9% ↑
Census Tract (-500)	39.75% ↑	27.3%
Census Tract (-1000)*	41.18% ↑	27.8% ↑
Census Tract (-400)	38.9%	27%

- 3) As with DC overall and the DC metropolitan area, Southwest has unmet affordable rent and family housing needs. We simply do not need more luxury housing, which has caused rents to increase in SW and Navy Yard three times higher than other areas. Only 637 units or 16% of major new developments (3,886 approximate total) are affordable based on the affordable housing pipeline map ([Southwest Voice | Curbed – Washington, DC](#)). This total does not include the entire 6,000 market units that are expected in Buzzard Point.
- 4) One-third of DC renters are behind on their rent. Even before COVID-19, renters were burdened by housing costs (US Census/Policy Map). This development poses an adverse effect on renters in Southwest since similar developments have been shown to increase the percentage change in month-to-month rental prices and fuel sharp concomitant rent increases in the 20024 zip code.



- 5) The Zoning Commission is an independent, quasi-judicial agency with statutory latitude and its intent should not be to rubber-stamp the Executive's development decisions. "It is empowered to grant relief from the strict application of the Zoning Regulations (variances) (dcoz.dc.gov)."
Further, the "Zoning Commission review may impose conditions or restrictions on airspace development in order to ensure: no undue adverse impacts on the surrounding area" (dcoz.dc.gov). An adverse impact of this development will further harden a major racial demographic shift that flouts both the current Comprehensive Plan Framework and the SW Small Area Plan. Your complicity as a Commission has caused unfettered de jure racial discrimination in housing and public health.
- 6) Southwest Voice developed a Development Equity Scoring Rubric for projects in Southwest given the overwhelming luxury, single person housing that continues to flood Southwest. Based on this rubric which uses benchmarks for housing from the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments, the current city administration, and inclusionary zoning, this project received a D- for development equity and initially an F-. ([Southwest Voice](#))
- 7) While this project is zoned for a "Credit Trade Area," it still exists within the Southwest Small Area Plan as indicated in the current land use map. The dictates of the Comprehensive Plan Framework and the Southwest Small Area Plan do **not** exempt this development.
- 8) The Zoning Commission is statutorily obligated to assess whether Zoning Regulations and the Zoning Map are followed in a means not inconsistent with the Comprehensive Plan, which includes the Southwest Small Area Plan. Further, the Comprehensive Plan – which is DC law – requires the Mayor to submit reports to DC Council at least once every 4 years on the District government's progress in implementing elements of the plan and the plan's key actions. The mayor has not submitted such as a report for the SW neighborhood element, so the Zoning Commission cannot even make an independent judgment in this case.
- 9) In October 2019, the DC Council unanimously passed the Framework Element of the Comprehensive Plan. This framework became law in February 2020. This proposal rejects every single dimension of equity in the current law by an overwhelming and unreasonable number of market units. This proposal must be assessed within the current framework.

Excerpts of the Comprehensive Plan Framework Element.

- "The District seeks to create and support an equitable and inclusive city. Growth must be managed equitably to support all District residents, including vulnerable communities and District protected classes. We must recognize that managing growth and change includes addressing the historic, structural, and systemic racial inequities and disenfranchisement of many District residents."

- A city must be diverse to thrive, and the District cannot sustain itself by only attracting small, affluent households. To retain residents and attract a diverse population, the city should provide services that support families.”
- “Diversity also means maintaining and enhancing the District's mix of housing types. Housing should be developed for households of different sizes, including growing families as well as singles and couples, and for all income levels”

Sincerely,

Southwest Voice Editorial Board

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