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DC Zoning Commission Public Hearing, October 26, 2020

My name is Jennifer Ho, and I am a concerned DC resident submitting written comments in opposition to CASE NO. 20-18 of the Zoning Commission for the District of Columbia. This new proposed development does not meet the goals of the Southwest Neighborhood Plan. The current proposal is another threat to the historic character of DC's Southwest neighborhood and takes Southwest further away from serving as a model for equity and diversity.

Washington, DC continues to be the most rapidly gentrifying city in the country, and it has not done so in an inclusive way that cares for its current residents. Southwest residents, including myself, overwhelmingly want to maintain the economic and racial diversity that make the community so strong and vibrant. Families who have been able to call Southwest their home for decades, some whom I have had the honor of meeting and saying hello to each morning, are getting pushed out because the DC government and developers prioritize potential profit more than opportunities to uplift human beings. One estimate says the Black population in Southwest has decreased from 67 to 40 percent since 2000. While politicians and companies in DC are eager now to say how much Black lives matter, they have failed to translate these free, low-risk verbal statements into financial or political investments.

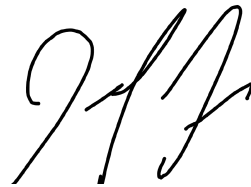
The land in this case is located within an Opportunity Zone (OZ). Designated in 2017 to encourage investment in area of dire need, OZ policy has catalyzed gentrification while providing tax deferment or abatement (see: www.southwestvoicedc.com/gentrification). "Almost 69 percent of the neighborhoods identified as gentrifying in the 2013-2017 data were either within or adjacent to an OZ." (source: ncrc.org/gentrification20/) Most of Southwest is within OZs, where the law does not require to prioritize affordable housing. The proposed development in this case would allocate eight percent of the total square footage for "affordable" units, with the inclusion of two existing rowhouses. How does this fit into the Mayor's goal of building 12,000 new affordable units over the next six years, and how is this plan appropriate, especially in the middle of a historic pandemic and ensuing economic and eviction crisis? DC needs to be better than this. This is insulting and ethically unacceptable for an area that has already experienced unprecedented gentrification and displacement, especially in the midst of an historic pandemic and exacerbated affordable housing crisis. The developer needs to understand the damage it will cause to this community if it refuses to meet the goals of projects receiving tax benefits by being located in an OZ.

The Zoning Commission must reject this development unless the developer redesigns the project to be an example of equity and inclusion with one-third of the units being market rate, one-third being workforce housing units, and one-third being deeply affordable units. If we are serious about the neighborhood meeting the Southwest Neighborhood Plan, we cannot solely rely on public land for affordable housing - private development must provide more than their fair share. The Courts have told the Commission that affordable housing is within the Commission's

purview for “design review,” Chairman Hood and Commissioner Miller believe it is. The Zoning Commission must step up to address our affordable housing crisis by demanding more affordable units from this project and others in the pipeline.

There is already a glut of luxury housing in Southwest, as evidenced by luxury apartment buildings having trouble filling units. We need to use the limited land in Southwest to provide safe, affordable housing to its residents so they are empowered to focus on education, career-building, and other critical areas rather than housing issues and skyrocketing payments.

I thank the members of the DC Zoning Commission for reading and considering my written comments in opposition to this case. The Zoning Commission must look at where it can build better housing to meet the dire and growing housing need, not just where it could produce the largest profit.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be the initials 'JH' or 'JF', written in a cursive style.