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From: Jennifer Ho <moshionpikcher@gmail.com>
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To: DCOZ - ZC Submissions (DCOZ)
Subject: Z.C. 21-20 - Letter of opposition

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DC Zoning Commission Case No. 21-20.

My name is Jennifer Ho, and I am a concerned DC resident submitting written comments in opposition to CASE NO. 21-20 of the Zoning Commission for the District of Columbia. This new proposed development does not meet the goals of the Southwest Neighborhood Plan, is incompatible with the increased focus on promoting racial equity, and does not align with the Office of the Attorney General's call for the Zoning Commission to take steps to enable more long-term residents to access affordable housing in the District. 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.

As Attorney General Karl Racine said, the District has grown dramatically over the last several years with significant benefits, but too often, this growth has hurt and pushed out long-term and low-income residents," said AG Racine. "As the first elected attorney general I've leaned into our public interest mission, and have worked to stand up for those who have been left behind by this growth.

Lack of proposed affordable units and adverse impact on the community

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 working alongside with on mutual aid efforts, 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 proposed development in this case would allocate just ten percent percent of the units as "affordable" units at 60% AMI – and no three-bedroom units. 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 amid a historic pandemic and ensuing economic hardship and exacerbated affordable housing crisis for many DC residents? DC needs to be better than this. This is insulting and ethically unacceptable for an area that has already experienced unprecedented gentrification and displacement.

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 for households earning 50 to 80 AMI, and one-third being deeply affordable units for households earning zero to 50 AMI. 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". According to Title II, Subtitle X, section 600.1(a) of the Zoning regulations, the Zoning Commission must find no adverse impact during the design review. This project will have an adverse impact, as it will lead to an unjustified discriminatory effect and will disproportionately harm a particular group of persons (Black residents) and harm the Southwest community generally by perpetuating segregated housing patterns. 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.