

Zoning Commission Roundtable
Case No. 22-RT1
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My name is Andrea Rosen, and I am representing DC for Democracy's Affordable Housing Group. DC for Democracy (often called DC4D) is an all-volunteer grassroots organization with over 800 members. Thank you for this opportunity to provide feedback on the Zoning Commission's Draft Racial Equity Analysis Tool.

The exodus of 20,000 African-Americans from Washington, DC, over the course of the last decade is now well-known. With pressure applied by the public, this shameful statistic drove the Council to insert into the Comprehensive Plan during its most recent amendment cycle a wealth of imperatives to obligate the government to "operationaliz[e] strategies for advancing racial equity." [Comprehensive Plan, 213.8]. In the Framework and in elements of the Plan, the government is instructed to develop and apply a **racial equity lens** when creating and implementing policies and practices. [e.g., 213.9] The Zoning Commission is specifically called upon to "evaluate all actions through a **racial equity lens** as part of its Comprehensive Plan consistency analysis." [2501.8]

The Comp Plan recognizes that racial equity can only be achieved if decision-making **processes** are *meaningfully* inclusive and **outcomes** are *measurably* better for underserved populations. "Equitable development is a participatory approach for meeting the needs of underserved communities . . ." [213.7] The District must steer growth and change to enable choice, not displacement, and it must "build the capacity of vulnerable, marginalized, and low-income communities to fully and substantively participate in decision-making processes and share in the benefits of the growth, while not unduly bearing its negative impacts." [213.7] The goal is to arrive at a point when "race can no longer be used to predict life outcomes, and outcomes for all groups are improved." [213.8]

The Zoning Commission's draft Racial Equity Tool displays a familiarity with equity issues, but falls well short of the Comp Plan's Implementation Policies and Actions, which specifically instruct District agencies to develop processes and tools to:

- Identify and consider past and current systemic racial inequities
- Identify who benefits or who is burdened from a decision
- Disaggregate data by race, and analyze data considering different impacts and outcomes by race; and
- Evaluate the program, activity or decision to devise measures, such as policies, plans, or requirements, that reduce systemic racial inequities, eliminate race as a predictor of results, and promote equitable outcomes [2501.4]

Development driven by developers is not equitable development, yet the Zoning Commission's draft Tool is so minimal that it gives applicants latitude to use it in a seemingly responsive fashion without ever doing the heavy lifting to overcome inequity: Employing data to evaluate current conditions in a specific community; meaningfully involving vulnerable, marginalized, low-income residents in the future of their home, from the very beginning until construction is complete; assessing ramifications of proposed change on impacted residents and businesses, and requiring interventions to mitigate displacement and advance housing equity; and measuring progress toward racial equity.

For example, the draft Tool is simplistic in limiting its consideration of **displacement** to "direct displacement" from a development site. McMillan applicants who came before the Zoning Commission asserted that displacement was not a problem because no one lived on McMillan Park. Yet other jurisdictions in the U.S. recognize that displacement arises from a complicated interlocking set of factors. Some governments encompass areas within a quarter mile of the project site in evaluating displacement risk. Our own Office of Tax and Revenue recognizes the speculative effect of large new market-rate projects by raising land assessments within at least a half mile radius, which in turn raises property taxes, and exerts pressure to maximize the zoning envelope.¹

We urge the Zoning Commission and the Office of Planning to examine the extensive racial equity tools developed by New York City, Boston, Chicago, Seattle, King County (WA), Montgomery County (MD), and Louisville (KY). Each has its strengths, but what they share is a reliance on data and a commitment to change.

- 1) Require racial equity analysis for all zoning decisions, not just contested cases, including map and text amendments. Map amendments are powerful drivers of change, and they can be used to sidestep community involvement, as at Barry Farm.
- 2) Standards for the Zoning's racial equity analysis must be codified through a Zoning text amendment.
- 3) The DC Office of Planning must develop data-rich profiles of local study areas.

Seattle has developed a **displacement risk index** that uses indicators like income, education, percentage of renters, percentage of housing-cost-burdened households to identify areas that are high-risk for displacement. It has also developed an **access to opportunity index** that include such indicators as high performing schools, number of jobs within a two-mile radius, access to fresh produce. A matrix of these two indices is used to describe each neighborhood in the city. These categories are used to analyze potential growth strategies and predict displacement.

¹ I did research on, and testified about, the effect of the Chancellors Way development on property taxes in surrounding Ward 5 neighborhoods at a March 2017 Zoning Commission hearing on the potential for gentrification around the redevelopment of McMillan Park. <https://app.dcoz.dc.gov/Exhibits/2010/ZC/13-14/Exhibit1217.pdf>

New York City has mandated the development of a publicly accessible equitable development data tool that provides data for demographic conditions, household economic security, neighborhood quality of life and access to opportunity, housing affordability and quality, housing production; it is disaggregated by race and ethnicity where available.

- 4) Require land-use applicants to identify how proposed projects will advance racial equity goals and/or exacerbate displacement.

Chicago has tasked each of its agencies to submit a racial equity goal for each year.

New York City requires applicants to report on a project's number of units by affordability types and expected rents or prices, as well as the household incomes needed to afford such units without incurring housing-cost burden.

Boston requires a fulsome accounting of how a project will further goals of desegregation and inclusivity; a review of potential racial and economic changes in the area where the project is proposed; and an analysis of the proposal's potential effect on rents in the area to ensure that longtime residents will not be priced out. The Boston Planning Development Agency must use the **Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing Assessment Tool** to project effects of a project on residents and businesses before development plans are approved.

- 5) Require applicants for land use permissions in high-displacement areas to propose up front, and implement, interventions to mitigate displacement and advance housing equity.

Boston requires applicants to implement solutions from a set list of interventions.

- 6) Track metrics from baseline data (see #1, above) to measure progress.

The Comp Plan's Implementation section calls for OP to publish progress reports every four years that "include monitoring data, activity and impact information that is disaggregated by age, gender, race, and income levels to assess whether goals around inclusivity, racial equity, and resilience are met, and whether commitments in the Framework Element are fulfilled." [2510.2]

See King County, WA, for an example.

- 7) Develop accountability / compliance mechanisms.

Again, we thank the Zoning Commission for developing the draft Racial Equity Analysis Tool. We urge the Commission to continue strengthening and enhancing this crucial mechanism until it can perform the function envisioned for it by the thousands of DC residents who put so much work into the Comprehensive Plan.