

Ackerman, Ella (DCOZ)

From: johnhanrahan5@gmail.com
Sent: Sunday, January 7, 2024 12:03 PM
To: DCOZ - ZC Submissions (DCOZ)
Cc: Schellin, Sharon (DCOZ)
Subject: Opposition on DC Zoning Case Number 23-02

Follow Up Flag: Follow up
Flag Status: Flagged

CAUTION: This email originated from outside of the DC Government. Do not click on links or open attachments unless you recognize the sender and know that the content is safe. If you believe that this email is suspicious, please forward to phishing@dc.gov for additional analysis by OCTO Security Operations Center (SOC).

[Some people who received this message don't often get email from johnhanrahan5@gmail.com. Learn why this is important at <https://aka.ms/LearnAboutSenderIdentification>]

To my good DC Zoning Commissioners and Office of Zoning staff,

I would like my comments below to be included on the public record in ZC Case No. 23-02. And, I am already on your list to testify on Monday January 8, 2024 in opposition to the rezoning application in this case.

STATEMENT BY JOHN HANRAHAN TO THE D.C. ZONING COMMISSION IN OPPOSITION TO CASE 23-02

Chairman Hood and Commission Members:

My name is John Hanrahan. I have been a resident of our stateless colony of Washington, D.C. for almost 60 years, the last 53 of those in Dupont Circle. My wife Debby and I live just one neighborhood over, six blocks away, from the public properties at 17th and U and V NW that are the subject of this Zoning Commission hearing on Case 23-02, the proposed upzoning of those properties.

I am testifying in opposition to this upzoning and in support of positions taken by Save DC Public Land, Empower DC and those numerous other citizens' groups and individuals with long-time roots in the community. I oppose applying once again at 17th and U the city's tired, failed, displacement/gentrification formula of using a giveaway to private developers of public land that belongs to all the people in the city.

Rather, I support the many calls you have heard (or will hear) throughout these proceedings that this site be used for social housing, a type of city-owned housing for families and individuals of various income levels that does not depend on extracting profits for private developers to build luxury housing, as this upzoning would permit. Social housing, as you have heard from many experts and advocates in this hearing, allows for the creation of deeply affordable units for lower-income people alongside people who can pay more.

My overall concerns with this proposed upzoning are very much those of other witnesses as to the issues of height, setbacks, the uncertain interim and long-term future of our fire and police stations, etc. But I am especially concerned that any luxury apartment development that will result from this upzoning will cause further increases in housing costs, with a resulting displacement of low- and moderate-income residents from an increasingly upscale neighborhood that has seen its Black and Brown population decrease dramatically – a 90% decrease in the Black population around U Street since 1990.

There doesn't have to be an outright "plan" to bring in higher-income, mainly white people into a neighborhood and displace long-term Black and Brown and lower-income white people, but the policies put in place in D.C. for the last few decades have produced those exact results, regardless of the intentions of our public officials. Isn't it about time we tried a model with its proven potential "as you have heard from expert witnesses" to stabilize housing costs and limit displacement while providing for a diversity of income levels in a neighborhood?

There is a strong belief, a theory, that has long been in the ascendancy in D.C. government planning circles and is the bedrock philosophy of the two major, very influential "smart-growth" organizations which support this proposed upzoning at 17th and U: Namely, just increase the overall housing supply, build housing at any level of cost "even excessive quantities of luxury housing" and the market will do the rest. I don't want to botch their theory, but to me I think their idea is that if you have an oversupply of luxury housing, that will force those owners to reduce rents or sales prices, which in turn will put downward pressure on the next lowest tier of housing units forcing them to reduce their prices, and so on and so on until you have a lot of much-needed affordable units for moderate-income people as well as deeply affordable units for lower-income families and individuals.

It seems like an interesting theory, until you look at the realities of D.C. over the past few decades and see that luxury housing units, as we say, beget more luxury housing units, beget more luxury housing units, and so on. We can't inclusionary-zone our way into deeply affordable housing, or rely on a theory that says some day, we don't know when, housing benefits will trickle down to all, if only we today just build-build-build whatever developers and investors want to build.

In supplemental comments filed in this upzoning case back in June of last year by the leading urbanist/smart-growth organization supporting this upzoning, their highly proficient policy director/organizer made the following interesting observation that I think speaks volumes about the current situation regarding our developer-driven housing situation: "I would not even suggest that upzoning will make housing more affordable anymore, because even though nearly no academic research finds otherwise, it doesn't always match people's lived experience." (The word "suggest" was italicized in the original, and the words from "nearly" to "otherwise" were underlined.)

Exactly. That little inconvenient quality known as "lived experience" where people observe and see with their own eyes the widespread displacement over the last few decades, and accumulate statistic after statistic, and example after example throughout the city of promises of "affordable" housing that somehow, alas, usually fail to materialize. This does tend to make folks skeptical of such a theory as it applies to the reality of D.C. (and many other major American and overseas cities) in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. I would note that organizations that advocate for deeply affordable housing in D.C. do NOT subscribe to the build-build-build-anything theory "and there is ample good reason for that, both statistically and experientially.

You members of the Zoning Commission will likely say that there is no zoning-related social-housing proposal before you right now, and that you do not formulate planning policy so social-housing per se is not in your purview. There is, though, the issue of displacement that you must take into consideration in your decision and in which social-housing testimony becomes especially relevant. In your official reports and decisions in this and other zoning cases, in testimony in budget and other proceedings before the Council, in consultations with the Mayor, et al., you can note emphatically that there is increasing support in the community for social housing while there is increasing opposition to the old model of city-promotes-a-giveaway-of-public-land and city-gives-tax breaks to developers "in exchange for a pittance of affordable units, with only a handful of deeply affordable units.

The crisis in deeply affordable housing in the area under consideration for upzoning, and the evidence that the old developer-driven model is a vehicle for displacement, is best illustrated by the following quote from Empower DC:

"In Ward One, the median family income for Black households is \$49,148. An affordable rate for that income would be \$14,744 per year. [30% of income.] Yet on U St. current rents for one-bedroom units are \$38,304 per year. That's

\$23,560 more than what most Ward One black families can afford. While prices soar, census tracts show a 90% decrease in the Black population around U St. since 1990.â€

Mr. Chairman and Commission members, please bear this in mind as you consider this upzoning request. I urge you to reject application 23-02. Thank you for your consideration.

John Hanrahan
johnhanrahan5@gmail.com
(202) 660-8096
Ward: 2
Zip: 20009