

From: Meg Maguire [megmaguireconsultant@msn.com]
Sent: Monday, October 11, 2010 2:40 PM
To: Campbell, Sarah (COUNCIL); Miller, Robert (COUNCIL)
Subject: Letter to Chairman Gray on height amendments to Comp Plan

Sarah and Rob,

Attached is a letter to Chairman Gray urging him to oppose the amendment to the Comp Plan that would set the measuring point for height at the top of the H St. Bridge behind Union Station. I am also sending a hard copy.

It is increasingly troublesome that we are having to fight planning battles over the established shape and principles of our city when there is so much to be done to really PLAN for the redevelopment of areas that need it. I hope that as the mayoral transition moves forward we build a strong planning agency, independent of economic development, that truly respects the public process and focuses on critical redevelopment of major areas of the city.

Amendments such as the ones OP is proposing to the Comp Plan are broad and sweeping. And their proposed zoning rewrite is radical and virtually incomprehensible to all but a few stalwarts. They have never presented photo visual simulations of how actual lots in the city would be affected and have made little attempt to educate communities about these proposed changes, including relaxing various provisions that neighborhoods have relied on to protect community character and curb excessive development. Increasing density is appropriate in some parts of the city and should be considered on a case-by-case basis. But it is not wise to adopt measures that would up-zone all areas within 3 blocks of streetcar or major transit stops!

It is time for a change in planning philosophy and leadership to get back to the really tough and urgent problems of the city.

Meg Maguire

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October 11, 2010

The Honorable Vincent Gray, Chair
DC City Council
1350 Pennsylvania Ave., NW
Washington, DC 20004

Dear Council Chair Gray,

My husband and I are thrilled that you will be our new mayor! CONGRATULATIONS on your primary victory! There is so much to be done to get this city back on track and I know that your wisdom, good sense, financial realism and spirit of collaboration will serve us well.

I am writing to urge you to **vote NO on the air rights text amendments of Bill 18-867, The Comprehensive Plan Amendment Act of 2010.**

As proposed, these amendments would lead to new zoning rules for establishing the maximum height of buildings constructed over railroad tracks and freeways. The Office of Planning is recommending that the Council endorse rezoning these sites, such as the Amtrak rail line area north of H Street Bridge, then measuring not from the ground as is required for every other building in the District, but from some higher point that OP hopes will result in intense development. *This is a clear end run around the Height Act.*

The effect of this amendment on our neighborhood would be to create a wall of tall buildings over the tracks 56 feet taller than the SEC building, further dividing the Hill from the other side of the tracks and towering over the buildings on either side of the tracks. Existing buildings surrounding that area can provide reasonable measuring points from grade or near grade. Beginning the height measurement from the apex of the bridge is not reasonable and it violates the Height Act. In addition, this new measuring device applied after these areas are up-zoned will result in large areas of very tall buildings that will challenge the prominence of the federal monuments and will permanently alter the iconic horizontal skyline.

I have seen the Akridge visual simulations and believe them to be distorted. The Office of Planning should provide accurate and impartial views from the edge of the Capitol Grounds across from Union Station (not from down the hill on Louisiana Ave.), from H

St. looking west, from I St. looking west, from the RRE building etc. These simulations should not be done by the developer but by the city or a private firm. And they should not misuse the important tool of visual simulation to make a case one way or the other.

Our neighborhood needs redevelopment, especially along H St. But development there must be done in a way that preserves and enhances the abutting residential neighborhoods. Both goals — smart development and sensitive development -- are possible to meet. Amending the Comp Plan to radically alter our landscape is neither smart nor sensitive for a city whose values and history we have inherited. **We must be wise stewards of the past, even as we are visionary developers of the future.**

Sincerely,

Meg Maguire