

**Government of the District of Columbia**  
**ADVISORY NEIGHBORHOOD COMMISSION 3-D**

P.O. Box 40486  
Palisades Station  
Washington, D.C. 20016

November 6, 2010

The Honorable Vincent C. Gray  
Chairman, Council of the District of Columbia  
The John A. Wilson Building  
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW, Suite 504  
Washington, D.C. 20004

RE: Public Hearing Record on Bill 18-867, "Comprehensive Plan  
Amendment Act of 2010"

Dear Chairman Gray:

This letter is in response to proposed new language recommended by the DC Office of Planning (OP) to amend the Comprehensive Plan. Specifically, ANC 3D voted recently at its November 3 meeting to oppose two recommended language changes put forward by OP relating to (1) transit oriented development (TOD) and (2) the measuring point to be used for air rights development. If adopted as amendments to the Comprehensive Plan, ANC 3D believes this new language will have the effect of destabilizing our neighborhoods, especially those in ANC 3D, and potentially alter the character of our city by reshaping our horizontal skyline.

Transit Oriented Development

Language (Action LU-1.3.B) recommended by OP for inclusion in the Comprehensive Plan to promote transit oriented development (TOD) would, in effect, encourage commercial development that is simply out-of-scale with the residential character of some of our neighborhoods in ANC 3D. The language would promote and encourage excessive commercial development in neighborhoods simply on the basis that they have access to bus service.

ANC 3D has many bus transportation corridors in its geographic area. However, few are appropriate for the scale of development that would be made possible by the language being recommended by OP. We are particularly concerned about the references in the new language to "pedestrian oriented villages."

Already, OP's efforts to encourage more TOD commercial development have prompted controversy in our community. As part of the American University (AU) Campus Planning process, for example, OP has recommended to AU that it relocate retail from the main campus and establish new retail commercial development on residentially-zoned property near Ward Circle – immediately adjacent to residents' homes – along an already congested bus route with no access to Metro. Residents are alarmed and believe that such new commercial development will permanently alter the character and destabilize the neighborhood and also devalue their property investment. Such retail commercial development at this location is not desired by residents and would be out-of-scale with the

surrounding neighborhood. Residents also are concerned this excessive development could make it more difficult to fill existing retail space that has been empty for more than a year.

On the other hand, OP has concluded such TOD development is appropriate at this location. OP made this conclusion without any consultation with the community – either informally or formally. This reflects a “we know best” pattern of management at OP that raises even more concerns about the potential impact of the language changes being recommended for the Comprehensive Plan.

We also are concerned that areas, such as 49<sup>th</sup> and Massachusetts Avenue NW in Spring Valley and the neighborhood commercial strips along MacArthur Boulevard in the Palisades would be cited as appropriate for “pedestrian oriented villages.” This could lead to more mixed use development that would be out-of-scale with these long-established low density residential neighborhoods.

Generally, we are concerned that adding such language in the Comprehensive Plan will lead to out-of-scale commercial development and permanently alter the character of many of our neighborhoods in ANC 3D and in other parts of our city. It is precisely the primarily residential nature and character of our city’s neighborhoods that will encourage people to relocate to DC and make these neighborhoods their homes. ANC 3D believes the city should be careful in making any changes to the Comprehensive Plan that would alter the fragile balance of residential and commercial development. This change recommended by OP will dramatically shift that balance and put our neighborhoods at unnecessary risk.

#### Air Rights Development

ANC 3D is equally concerned about language (LU-1.1.8) proposed by OP that would change the origin of the building height measuring point established by the Zoning Commission in 2003. The proposed OP action for the measurement of buildings where the curb grade has been artificially changed by a bridge, viaduct, embankment, ramp, abutment, excavation, tunnel, or other type of artificial elevation would establish a new measuring point for development in areas where the grade has been artificially changed. This action has the potential for an “end run” around the Height Act.

ANC 3D has previously testified before the Zoning Commission in support of making the “natural grade” the point of origin for height measurement. This type of language would ensure that single family homes would not be subject to “berming up” – often used by developers to gain additional height.

Our primary concern is that new development be of appropriate scale and height for the surrounding neighborhood and the city as a whole.

#### Conclusion

ANC 3D is on record in support of development that promotes neighborhood stability; that is of appropriate scale and height for surrounding neighborhoods and the city as a whole; and that contributes and preserves the residential character of our neighborhoods. We are deeply concerned that the changes to the Comprehensive Plan recommended by OP will lead to the destabilizing of our neighborhoods. The future growth and prosperity of our city is rooted in the stability and character of our residential neighborhoods.

In its zeal to adopt a template for growth, OP has overlooked – and dismissed – the values and principles outlined in the current language of the Comprehensive Plan that seek to build a city that is a livable, thriving urban environment rooted in strong neighborhoods.

ANC 3D is comprised of the Palisades, Spring Valley, Wesley Heights, Foxhall, Kent, Cathedral, and American University neighborhoods. By a unanimous vote of 6-0 at its November 3 meeting, ANC 3D voted to ask you to oppose the changes in language recommended by OP. ANC 3D strongly encourages you to avoid making changes in the Comprehensive Plan that would promote out-of-scale commercial development that has the potential to intrude on the character of residential neighborhoods like those found in ANC 3D and throughout the city.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tom Smith / AG". The signature is written in a cursive style and is placed on a light-colored, slightly textured rectangular background.

Thomas M. Smith  
Chair, ANC 3D

Cc: Members of the DC Council  
Harriet Tregoning