

Minority Opinion of Zachary Ferguson
Advisory Neighborhood Commissioner, ANC 3/4G-07
Re: ANC 3/4G Resolution Concerning Proposed Rezoning of Upper
Connecticut Avenue NW Commercial Core, April 25, 2024

Dear Zoning Commission,

As the ANC Commissioner for single-member district 07 (SMD-07), I submit this minority opinion to express support for the Office of Planning's proposed text and map amendment to rezone upper Connecticut Avenue NW in Chevy Chase (Z.C. Case No. 23-25).

The ANC resolution passed by a vote of 4-3. It advises that existing zoning in the subject area be increased by no more than five feet (60 inches). I have significant concerns about this recommendation.

For context, SMD-07 is only a few blocks south of the Civic Core site, with Military Road as our northern boundary. Of the seven single-member districts in ANC 3/4G, SMD-07 is the most racially and economically diverse. A notable reason for that is because SMD-07 includes a variety of denser housing types and many dedicated affordable housing units. Our neighborhood has townhouses, boutique apartments, the only public housing in Ward 3 (160-unit, 9-story Regency House built in 1964), and the largest Chevy Chase apartment building (261 units), which includes Inclusionary Zoning (IZ) units. This diversity of housing has fostered a walkable and inclusive community where residents of various backgrounds and income levels can thrive.

If SMD-07's zoning had been more restrictive and exclusionary, many of my neighbors that call Chevy Chase home would not have had an opportunity to live here. Lower height allowances would have reduced the number of affordable units. SMD-07 would have been less inclusive and vibrant than it is now.

Some important context beyond SMD-07 is that the number of unsheltered residents in DC jumped to 4,922 people, an 11.6% increase from 2022 to 2023.¹ Despite the large spike in DC residents lacking shelter, the Office of Planning — to accommodate the concerns some residents have raised — scaled *down* its initial zoning proposal and thereby reducing potential affordable housing opportunities in Chevy Chase. This decision came around the time the Urban

¹ <https://dcist.com/story/23/05/05/dc-homelessness-increase-2023-pit-count/>

Institute released a study finding that 19% of DC children are facing housing insecurity.²

Many Chevy Chase residents support affordable housing here and want our neighborhood to be part of the solution, though there is disagreement about where exactly it should go. As the resolution notes, our Rock Creek West planning area remains woefully behind on its affordable housing goals, having achieved a mere 10% of its 2025 target. Moreover, to my knowledge, Chevy Chase has contributed zero dedicated affordable units since 2019, and zero are scheduled to be built here by the program's 2025 goal year.

I also remain concerned that many voices are underrepresented in this zoning process. As a parent of a young child, I personally have struggled to fully engage in the numerous evening meetings held by our ANC, which often conflict with family dinners and bedtime routines. When I speak with fellow parents at the Civic Core playground, school events, and other community gatherings, their primary concerns are not about technical zoning details like mechanical penthouses or floor area ratios. Instead, I hear frustrations over the exorbitant cost of housing in Chevy Chase, which is not only an immediate concern but raises questions about the future. If our children grow up to become police officers or teachers and wish to start their own families in the neighborhood they once called home, the current housing market — with three-bedroom rentals averaging around \$50,000 annually and homes typically exceeding \$1 million — would likely render that unattainable.

The Office of Planning's proposed zoning changes, while more modest than what is currently allowed in SMD-07, represent a reasonable step towards more diversity and inclusion in the Connecticut Avenue corridor. The proposal allows contextually appropriate redevelopment that aligns with the Comprehensive Plan's goals.

The potential benefits extend beyond housing affordability. New residents would bring more customers to our local businesses, improve walkability, and bolster WMATA bus ridership. The design guidelines and transitional setbacks thoughtfully address neighborhood context while still allowing a reasonable development envelope.

² https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/2023-11/Housing%20Insecurity%20in%20the%20District%20of%20Columbia_0.pdf

The resolution's recommendation for a 60-inch height increase is insufficient to meaningfully advance our housing and equity goals and, in my view, does not reflect a reasonable compromise of varying community interests. I urge the Zoning Commission to approve OP's proposed amendment as a step toward the inclusive and forward-looking development envisioned in the Chevy Chase Small Area Plan — which was requested by this very ANC.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Zachary Ferguson
Advisory Neighborhood Commissioner, 3/4G-07