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Single Member District 1E06

Testimony before the Committee of the Whole
Oversight Hearing on the Office of Planning
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Chair Mendelson, councilmembers, and staff members, thank you for the opportunity to testify. My name is Josh Jacobson, and I am the ANC representing SMD 1E06, located in Pleasant Plains. I am here to testify on the housing crisis DC faces.

Office of Planning:

Whether or not some want this to be the case, our city will grow in the coming decades. As the population grows, it is going to put more pressure on our housing stock and drive up costs. There is no way around it - if we want to reduce displacement of existing residents (especially lower income families), we will need to be bold in allowing much more housing by right than we currently allow.

With the upcoming rewrite of the Comprehensive Plan, I wanted to make a few suggestions:

- 1) We should allow by right construction of fourplexes throughout the District
- 2) We should upflum our arterials (especially those areas close to a major metro line) to be at least Residential High Density

Office of Planning predicts that our population will be 845,000 by 2050. That is an additional 165,000 residents. We should be planning on 250,000 additional households being built by 2050 to accommodate that growth and reduce displacement.

HPRB:

Historic preservation is too often used to freeze in place a problematic past of our city and make it more difficult to improve neighborhoods. We often default to preserving structures as the only way to remember history, when there are plenty of other opportunities that are cheaper and do not reduce housing. A prime example of this is the historic preservation of the Samuel Gompers house in Bloomingdale. Yes, he lived in this house while doing important union work, but there are other ways that his contributions are recognized. I am also skeptical that someone who worked to exclude black people from his neighborhood deserves to have his house historically preserved when a plaque recognizing his contributions and problematic past would be sufficient.

I have a couple of suggestions for the Council in this regard:

First, we should require recertification of historic districts and locations over time, and we should set a budget for the amount of land that can be historically preserved in the city.

Our standards for what is acceptable conduct in the past change over time. This is not to say that we should rewrite history, but it does mean that we should stop placing emphasis on people that did terrible things. Creating a set budget of land that can be preserved allows us to recognize that we cannot (and should not) preserve our city in amber, and we must recognize that there are tradeoffs in limitless preservation.

Second, I can understand why some people want to preserve the look and feel of a neighborhood. There is a way to do that while still allowing for more housing to be constructed. The Council should seriously consider removing height and mass from HPRB's purview and keeping it solely with the Office of Zoning where it belongs. It is duplicative to have two different agencies controlling the height and mass of buildings within a given area.

Lastly, I have heard many complaints about the cost of changing windows in historic dwellings, with costs for a single window being in the thousands of dollars. This is an unaffordable option for many families. Yes, we can have programs to help reduce those costs for lower income homeowners, but this does not seem to be a prudent way to spend our tax dollars during a potential budget crunch.

Thank you for your time, and I will stick around in case there are any questions.

Josh Jacobson