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**Testimony before the Executive Administration and Labor
Oversight Hearing on the Executive Office of the Mayor
February 29, 2024**

Chair Bonds, 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 Mayor's plans for housing.

On Monday, February 26th, Mayor Bowser released her Downtown Action Plan. I appreciate that she understands the need to grow the residential base in our downtown corridors.

The plan states the following points:

- Begin effort to amend the Height Act by studying areas where modest increases in height caps could maximize affordable housing opportunities
- Evaluate modifications to the Historic Preservation Review Board (HPRB) process to ensure a productive balance between housing supply and historic preservation goals

I want to commend the Mayor and her team for understanding that historic preservation sometimes runs counter to our housing production goals. I agree with our Mayor, and I am thankful that in 2019 she set a goal of 36,000 new homes by 2025. A goal that we are well on our way to achieving.

The Office of Planning predicts that our population will be 845,000 by 2050. That is an additional 165,000 residents. If we want to reduce displacement of existing residents, we will need to be bold in allowing much more housing by right across the city than we currently allow. I urge Mayor Bowser to continue her leadership in this regard and set an ambitious goal of 250,000 new housing units by 2050.

I recommend a few approaches to accomplish this goal:

Review Criteria for Designation in the D.C. Inventory (10 DCMR 201.1) and research potential adjustments. The current language for what qualifies as historic is relatively broad and leads to abuse. A recent example is the inclusion of a parking lot for Chevy Chase Savings Bank as a historic landmark. It is incredibly troubling that a parking lot was included for historic preservation when even the applicants did not discuss the merits of the parking lot being marked for preservation¹. This should go without saying, but in the abstract, our preservation laws should not allow for something like a parking lot to be landmarked and historically preserved. I urge the Mayor and her team to start a review process of the current criteria and consider adjustments. One potential avenue is to increase the number of criteria that a proposed historic landmark or district must meet before being considered.

¹ <https://ggwash.org/view/89813/dcs-historic-board-voted-to-protect-a-non-historic-parking-lot-why>

Work with Council to clarify that height and mass are exclusively under the purview of the Office of Zoning. I 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. Regulations should be clarified that the Office of Zoning has full jurisdiction over these matters. It is duplicative to have two different agencies controlling the height and mass of buildings within a given area.

Allow by right construction of fourplexes throughout the District and upflum our arterials (especially those areas close to a major metro line) to be at least Residential Medium Density. I agree with the Mayor's plan to pursue modifications to the Height Act. However, there are plenty of other opportunities that do not require congressional action that we should be pursuing.

Neighboring jurisdictions are taking bold action in increasing their housing supply. Our region will continue to grow, and we will increase our tax base by building more housing. Legalizing fourplexes throughout the District is a modest solution to help us compete with Montgomery County and Northern Virginia. And upflumming our transit corridors will help us increase density while also creating more customers for WMATA.

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

Josh Jacobson