

DC Zoning Changes Network

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DC Zoning Rewrite: City Council Chair Phil Mendelson Says Tregoning's Zoning Rewrite has Broken the Public Trust; DC Residents Complain that the ZRR is Longer, More Difficult to Use, and Eliminates Public Input

Washington, DC – On Wednesday, March 5, Councilmember Phil Mendelson, Chair of the Committee of the Whole, held a performance oversight hearing of the Office of Planning and the Office of Zoning.

More than a dozen DC residents from around the City testified in support of rejecting the nine-hundred and eighty-five pages of proposed changes to the current zoning code as submitted by Office of Planning and setdown by the Zoning Commission in September 2013.

Longtime Ward 4 resident and ANC Commissioner Renee Bowser testified, "The failure of OP to get specific input from neighborhoods to be impacted by [OP's proposed] sweeping [zoning] changes, constitutes poor and neglectful performance of the agency." Bowser continued, "We are not asking for special treatment from OP we just want the same type of consideration given to other parts of the City."

Mrs. Jennifer Steingasser, Deputy Director of the Office of Planning, has publicly admitted that the Office of Planning worked collaboratively with Georgetown ANC-area residents over a two-year period so to adopt "custom" zoning regulations that protects Georgetown's unique historic district.

Ward 8 Commissioner Pho Palmer explained to CM Mendelson that, "This plan should not be a one size fits all, because every community is unique ... and ... if you are not at the table, then you are on the menu, and Congress Heights is on the menu." Palmer says her community has been left out of the conversation and concluded her testimony by requesting that the Office of Planning, "Put [the ZRR] to the side until we have a new [planning] director."

Steingasser has emphasized continually that OP's proposed zoning changes meets their objective to modernize the current zoning regulations by making them simpler to read and easier to navigate.

But according to testimony from longtime Ward 3 advocate and lawyer Sue Hemberger, "OP has failed to produce a draft that rationalizes and simplifies the existing code... partly due to sheer incompetence... and a culture of disingenuousness." Hemberger demonstrated some examples, "The ZRR is three hundred pages longer than the current code... and the current code has thirty-five zoning map designations with an additional twenty-five zoning overlays, whereas the proposed ZRR code has one-hundred and forty-two different zoning designations.... This is not streamlining the code."

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At the hearing, OP's Steingasser stated, "Clearly there has been a lot of controversy about the ZRR."

Colleen Hackett, a resident of Ward One agreed and plainly told CM Mendelson, "We ask that the zoning revisions for Mount Pleasant be revoked."

Longtime Dupont Circle resident Anne Sellin testified, "People invest a great deal in their homes and should have some assurance about the stability and protection of their investments... [but] because the proposed [zoning] changes are so difficult to comprehend... and are in conflict with the DC Comprehensive Plan, I believe the ZRR should be abandoned."

Ward 5 advocate Phil Blair emphasized public concern about the ZRR when stating, "The Office of Planning has squandered the trust that many of us once gave it. It is well on the way to becoming the Office of Plotting against [public] interests not of planning for them."

Towards the end of the hearing, Councilmember Mendelson said the public testimony conveyed, "a rather profound unhappiness with the Office of Planning." Mendelson went on to say that he thinks the Office of Planning has, "created an enormous amount of public distrust and it's going to make everything OP does difficult."

The Zoning Commission recently announced that the record for the Zoning Rewrite will stay open until at least April 25, 2014 to receive public comment.

Supporting links:

- For more info from the Office of Zoning , see here >>
<http://dcoz.dc.gov/news/2014/news02252014a.shtm>
- The March 5, 2014 Council Oversight Hearing on the Office of Planning can be seen here >>
http://208.58.1.36:8080/channel13/March2014/03_05_14_COW.mp4