



PRESS RELEASE For Immediate Release

Developers Take Aim at the Comprehensive Plan

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Some developers are taking aim at DC's Comprehensive Plan—a key planning document that provides a framework for future city growth and development—in hopes of expediting projects by avoiding legal challenges by residents. Specifically, they are hoping to modify the Plan to preempt the ability of residents to challenge Planned Unit Developments (PUD). A PUD is a Zoning Commission action that permits a project to exceed “by-right” allowances that are within the established zoning regulations for a site.

Last year, the DC Court of Appeals overturned the Zoning Commission's approval of two projects: 901 Monroe Street, NE (“Colonel Brooks”) and the McMillan Reservoir project because these projects exceeded the density that is permitted under the Plan. In a response to these rulings, a coalition of DC-area developers and organizations recently issued a “Priorities Statement” of proposed revisions to the Comprehensive Plan. Most of the proposed changes concern increasing access to affordable housing, but one calls for empowering the Zoning Commission to be able to ignore the Comprehensive Plan:

“Clarify zoning authority. Through the Comprehensive Plan, the District should affirm that the Zoning Commission has the purview to allow increased density for Planned Unit Developments that supersedes the levels in the Comprehensive Plan's maps in exchange for community benefits.”

The Comprehensive Plan is currently going through a revision cycle and if such language is adopted in the Plan, it would empower the Zoning Commission to approve development projects that exceed density and other limits set by the Plan. The Zoning Commission currently does not have that authority, and residents are able to challenge their decisions through legal recourse.

“Residents and developers rely on the Comprehensive Plan for the appropriate size of developments,” said Stephen Hansen, Chair of the Committee of 100 on the Federal City. “It's outrageous that some developers are seeking to upend the certainty offered by the Plan so that they can have an unchecked shot at development at such sites as McMillan, the 901 Monroe Street site, and sites across the city. The Committee of 100 calls on Mayor Bowser, city planners, and the Council of the District of Columbia to reject this misguided attempt to tilt the playing field even further against residents and their concerns.”

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