



Zoning Commission Set to Allow Buildings Citywide to Go Up Two Stories

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A complex zoning proposal (Zoning Case 14-13) will allow commercial and residential development on D.C. rooftops and create incentives to tear down low-rise apartment buildings and replace them with higher, pricier units. The proposal also could encourage the conversion of low-rise supermarkets to high-rise, mixed-use projects.

The regulations would allow 20-foot penthouses – two full stories -- and relax setback requirements. Penthouse structures no longer would have to maintain a 1:1 foot setback from all exterior walls. In short, the proposed new rules give properties (except single-family houses and townhouses) two bonus floors of development capacity.

In these circumstances, the owner of a low-rise garden apartment has every reason to consider tearing it down and rebuilding at 5 stories, instead of 2 or 3. The situation in C-2-A zones (low to moderate density neighborhood commercial districts) is even more dramatic. At present, a 20-foot supermarket on MacArthur Boulevard can expand by right to 50 feet. It could gain two more stories from exploiting the new penthouse rules, if they pass.

Alma H. Gates, Chair of the Committee of 100's Zoning Subcommittee, protested the scope of the new rules and the speed with which they are being rushed through. "These rules were proposed at a time when Advisory Neighborhood Commissions and civic associations were overwhelmed with the zoning rewrite," Gates said. "This is a complex set of rules that can change the face and character of our city. They need a broader discussion than they have been given." Gates urged residents to file testimony immediately opposing the changes and to ask the Zoning Commission to hold the record open and conduct public roundtables. The record closes on November 24, 2014.

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