

TO: Anita Cozart, Director, District of Columbia Office of Planning  
DATE: June 1, 2023

RE: Comments on New York Avenue NE Vision Framework Draft Recommendations

---

These comments are submitted on behalf of individuals and organizations who are committed to furthering racial, economic, and environmental justice. We are guided by the following core principles and goals: attaining racial, economic, and environmental justice; stopping displacement; using public resources to meet public needs; ensuring equitable access to public services; and community-led planning and development which lifts up opportunity and leaves no one behind.

\*\*\*

Roughly half of the city's industrially-zoned property is located in Ward 5 and much of it is centered in the New York Avenue NE Future Planning Analysis Area. For too long, residents of this area have had to endure the ill effects of adjacent industrial activity and accompanying poverty, unemployment, and economic distress. As the DC Office of Planning embarks on planning for new commercial and residential growth in this area, meeting the needs of existing and long-term residents must come first. It is in that spirit and with that in mind, that we offer the following summary comments followed by general and specific comments:

- OP's draft recommendations are silent on the potential health implications of industrial uses (PDR) for existing and prospective new residents in communities along the New York Avenue NE corridor.
- Analysis of PDR uses in the Future Planning Analysis Area and strategies for mitigating any ill effects associated with those uses must be completed so as to inform the New York Avenue NE Vision Framework, the Ivy City Small Area Plan, and new zoning designations in the area.
- Anti-displacement measures must precede new development.
- Upzoning undermines use of the Planned Unit Development process on which many of OP's recommended community benefits depend.
- New green space must include publicly-controlled parks and may require land acquisition and/or changes to existing land use designations.

### General and Specific Comments

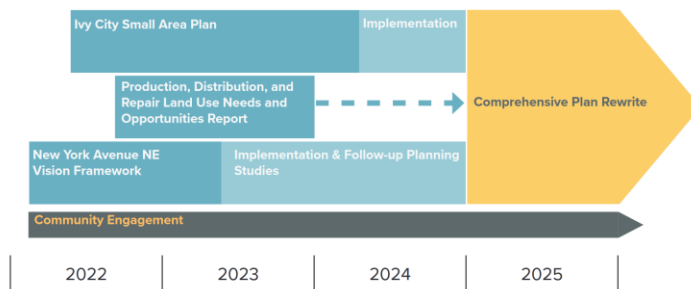
#### General Over-Arching Comment

The District's Comprehensive Plan Generalized Policy Map identifies the New York Avenue NE Corridor and surrounds as one of several "Future Planning Analysis Areas". See map below.



In 2022, the Office of Planning began a series of three planning studies required to implement the land use changes envisioned in the New York Avenue NE Future Planning Analysis Area: 1) the New York Avenue Vision Framework, 2) the Ivy City Small Area Plan, and 3) the Production Distribution and Repair (PDR) Retention Land Report (Attachment 1). As described by OP, these studies were three community-informed planning efforts that would be “coordinated and build on each other throughout the planning process to inform housing, economic development, resilience, and racial equity”. See OP’s projected timeline for the three studies below.

This Roadmap launches OP’s series of planning studies for the New York Avenue NE corridor shown in the timeline below. OP will engage residents, businesses and other stakeholders through these efforts.



It’s critical that this troika of studies proceed in tandem. Each addresses aspects of life along the corridor and each should inform the other so that, together, they can be considered as a whole. It’s impossible to imagine equitable development of the area occurring without the benefit of key information provided in each of the three studies. For example, wouldn’t the city want a better understanding of the existing PDR uses in the study area and the potential for health effects and increasing land use conflicts before it launches the development of tens of thousands of new housing units in the corridor? Likewise, wouldn’t Ivy City residents, as they embark on Small Area Planning, want this same understanding of PDR uses in the area and a better understanding of steps needed to reduce adverse health impacts caused or exacerbated by them? And, don’t PDR property owners and tenants deserve an understanding of land use changes and conflicts that could jeopardize their ability to do future business in their current locations?

It's concerning that gradually, over the past year, OP's planning in this analysis area seems to have become more compartmentalized and more narrowly focused on New York Avenue and its immediate surrounds. Work has only barely begun on the Ivy City Small Area Plan. There's no evidence, at all, that work has begun on the PDR Report. We urge OP to re-align the three planning studies to the extent possible so as to avoid planning for any one area without essential relevant planning information from another.

It should be noted that D.C. Law 24-20 requires the PDR Retention Land Report to be completed prior to or concurrent with any future planning analyses in the New York Avenue corridor. While we are interested in all aspects of the PDR report, we are particularly interested in the identification of strategies to reduce the concentration of PDR uses in the study area, including the vast sites in Brentwood, Ivy City, and near Eckington which include heavy industrial polluters and acres of surface parking lots contributing to heat islands and poor air quality. There's also a lack of enforcement of environmental laws and environmental impact assessment in this area. Not all necessary improvements are tied to new development; some require land use changes to reverse the harmful effects of environmental racism.

### Specific Comments

#### Produce and Preserve Housing

- The District government has a sizeable number of programs aimed at assisting residents to avoid displacement and to locate and maintain housing affordability. These programs are housed within a number of District Government agencies.

We urge OP to work with the Department of Housing and Community Development and others to assess whether these programs are sufficient to prevent displacement and whether information about these programs is effectively available to a variety of age groups and demographics in the study area and elsewhere.

- OP is working on an “anti-displacement strategy”. Will this strategy be aligned with the New York Avenue NE Vision Framework? OP should be far more specific in identifying the forces of displacement (rising rents, conversions, homeowners faced with rising taxes or repair costs, etc.), the specific properties at risk, and specific interventions for each. Work to prevent displacement should begin immediately and ahead of study area improvements which may accelerate displacement.
- New zoning designations along New York Avenue NE and in the Planning Analysis Area should await completion of the New York Avenue Vision Framework, the Ivy City Small Area Plan, and the PDR Retention Land Report.

It's worth noting the Comprehensive Plan prescriptions regarding Future Planning Analysis Areas: “Planning analyses generally establish guiding documents. Such analyses shall predece any zoning changes in this area....Planning should also focus on issues most relevant to the community that can be effectively addressed through a planning process....For the purposes of determining whether a planning analysis is

needed before a zoning change, the boundaries of the Future Planning Analysis Areas shall be considered as drawn...The intent is that both steps of the two-step process must occur: planning analyses and then appropriate rezoning... (Comprehensive Plan Section 2503.)

- Several OP recommendations support provision of amenities (i.e., family-sized units, community-serving goods and services, welcoming public spaces, bicycle parking, public gathering spaces) through the Planned Unit Development (PUD) process. It should be noted that new zoning designations to high-density mixed-use zones will undermine use of the PUD process by enabling by-right development where no consultation and no community benefits are required.

If OP is depending upon the PUD process to yield amenities, then it should specifically require (as it has on occasion in connection with Small Area Plans) that denser zones should only be proposed and approved by the Zoning Commission through a PUD process. In the alternative, OP could consider a zoning text amendment requiring consultation and meaningful public benefits in connection with map amendment cases.

- We support and appreciate OP's support for affordable rental and ownership opportunities and family-sized units. Larger families may need more than three bedrooms. Multi-generational families, including families with adult children with special needs, should also be accommodated.

### Increasing Resilience

- We support and appreciate OP's support for developing opportunity-rich neighborhoods, preparing residents for good jobs, reducing greenhouse gas emissions, encouraging electric vehicles, and encouraging development of welcoming public spaces.
- We support and appreciate OP's support for maximizing tree canopy and green space. Green roofs may also be helpful in improving resilience, stormwater retention, air quality and in reducing heat. Insofar as overhead utility lines interfere with street tree growth and are visually unattractive, we urge OP to require property owners to under ground utility lines when redeveloping a property.
- We support and appreciate OP's support for adding and improving park and recreation space and public gathering places. Specific locations should be identified in the final Planning Analysis and we would like to work with OP to identify such locations. Not all public space in the study area should be privately owned or controlled.
- OP suggests a community resilience hub may be located within Ivy City, to be included in the Ivy City Small Area Plan. We assume that OP is referring to the Crummell School site. It is imperative that OP recognize that the Ivy City community is leading the Crummell planning process, along with DPR and DGS, and the functions of a resilience hub may or may not fit into their needs and priorities for the long-awaited community

space. Therefore, additional sites and opportunities to address resilience within the New York Avenue NE corridor should be identified.

### Strengthen Connections

- We support and appreciate OP's support for enhancing bus service in the communities along the corridor, exploring opportunities to reuse the abandoned railroad bridge across the corridor, requiring property owners to improve or add sidewalks when redeveloping a property, and encouraging short- and long-term bicycle parking.
- The Comprehensive Plan's Future Land Use Map designates the New York Avenue NE corridor for high-density mixed-use development. At the same time, OP rightly recommends maximizing parks and green space along the corridor. We recommend that OP seek FLUM and zoning changes to accommodate and enable preservation and development of additional parks and green space along the corridor.

### Reinforce the Corridor's Unique Identity

- We support and appreciate OP's support for concentrating building height along New York Avenue, NE and for incorporating public art.
- We support and appreciate OP's support for retaining the study area's unique visual identity by adaptively reusing industrial buildings. The adaptive reuse of the Hecht Company Warehouse Building is an attractive example. We would like to work with OP to identify specific other existing buildings and/or existing attractive building design elements that could be considered for adaptive reuse and/or preservation.

### Other Comments

- At various locations along the NY Avenue corridor and within the study area exist shelters and housing for homeless and other displaced persons and families. What is OP's vision for the future of this housing? What steps does OP plan to prevent displacement of or to assure alternatives to this housing in the face of rising redevelopment pressures?
- There are very few north-south intersections with the NY Avenue corridor study area. One of them is the mini-circle at Montana Avenue NE and it is widely considered one of the worst, most dangerous intersections in DC. What is OP's plan for improving the Montana Avenue intersection? We urge OP to work with DDOT on potential improvements including the possibility of burying NY Avenue under the mini-circle, analogous to where Connecticut Avenue NW is buried at Dupont Circle.
- It's not apparent that OP has affirmatively attempted to include the voices and input of business and property owners along the NY Avenue corridor and/or in the study area at

large (e.g., in the industrially-zoned PDR areas adjacent to the corridor). No decisions should be made about the future of the study area without including the voices of the people who live and work there.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment. Please direct any follow-up questions you may have to Parisa Norouzi ([parisa@empowerdc.org](mailto:parisa@empowerdc.org)) or Caroline Petti ([carolinepetti@yahoo.com](mailto:carolinepetti@yahoo.com).)

Signed:

Empower DC

Caroline Petti, Ward 5 Resident

Assembly of Petworth

Coalition for Environmentally Safe Communities

Preshona Ambri

Brown Girls Think, LLC

Committee of 100 on the Federal City

Nina Dodge, Ward 4 Resident

LaTricea Adams

Ray Michael Bridgewater

## **Attachment 1**

### **D.C. Law 24-20 Comprehensive Plan Amendment Act of 2021**

#### **Sec. 4. PDR Retention Land Report**

**(a)** No later than January 2024, the Office of Planning shall provide to the Council a report giving additional guidance on the following:

**(1)** Identification of the amount, location, and characteristics of land sufficient to meet the District's current and future needs for Production Distribution and Repair (PDR) land;

**(2)** Quantifiable targets for PDR land retention; and

**(3)** Strategies to retain existing and accommodate future PDR uses, particularly for high-impact uses.

**(b)** Further, the study will address the Council's concern that mixing other uses, particularly residential, with PDR uses will create economic conditions and land-use conflicts that will reduce land and areas available for PDR uses, particularly high-impact uses.

**(c)** Any strategies to expand PDR land designations or accommodate future PDR uses shall prioritize areas that do not currently have a disproportionate amount of PDR-designated land. Strategies should consider technological advances or efficiency measures to utilize PDR land more effectively. The study shall incorporate racial equity analyses.

**(d)** This study shall be completed prior to or concurrent with any future planning analyses in the New York Avenue, NW, corridor.