



EMPOWER DC

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TESTIMONY FOR THE RECORD

Of the March 18, 2021 hearing on Office of Planning

Submitted by Parisa Norouzi, Director, Empower DC

My name is Parisa Norouzi and I am the Executive Director of the citywide community action organization Empower DC. For the past 20 years I have worked with DC's lowest income communities on issues of housing, equitable development, environmental justice and related concerns. Throughout this time the Office of Planning has consistently failed to serve as a resource and representative of community-level priorities, but has rather become a tool of the Mayor's office in the fulfillment of her development agenda.

A great example of this is the Ivy City community and the historic Alexander Crummell School site. This historic Black community has fought for every basic need and improvement since its founding in 1872. The community has been on record with its need for green space, recreation and desire to see the Crummell school reopened as a community center since it closed in 1977.

Yet, as the community has rapidly gentrified, there has been no effort on the part of the Office of Planning to engage in Small Area Planning or ensure that the community needs are addressed. There was a Northeast Gateway Plan back in 2003 which evidently was abandoned and never approved. There was a Neighborhood Stabilization Plan in 2011 that came with an Ivy City Greening Report which was ignored. Then later there was the Ward 5 Works report of the Industrial Land Task Force.

In all of these documents and more, the desire of Ivy City residents to see green, parks and recreation spaces and a restored Crummell School have been echoed.

Yet Mayor Bowser doesn't want to prioritize public use and green space on the Crummell School site – she wants private development.

So, at the request of Holland and Knight on behalf of developers, the Office of Planning approved changes to the Future Land Use Map for the Crummell School site, and the two adjoining properties – an entire city block. This change sets the stage for these properties to be developed with moderate density residential. In changing the FLUM, OP gives developers a leg up in the development approval process. They now can go to the Zoning Commission and request a zoning change to match the FLUM. This is a non-contested case and there will be no public witnesses. Once the Zoning Commission approves that change, developers can move forward as a matter of right, circumventing the PUD process and avoiding the development of a Community Benefits Agreement.

How is this in the best interests of Ivy City residents?

I stand with Ivy City today in asking for your support, Chairman Mendelson, to make sure these FLUM changes are removed prior to final passage of the Comprehensive Plan and that Ivy City gets a Small Area Plan. We also echo the community's request for \$20million in the upcoming budget to restore Crummell School as a public community center and park.

Another example of the Office of Planning not adequately representing the community's interests is during the Barry Farm PUD process back in 2014. The Office of Planning plays a role in these proceedings, but often seems to be just a rubber stamp for development to move forward. In the court's ruling on the successful appeal of the Barry Farm PUD, the court noted "The DC Office of Planning... representative's testimony... suggested a gap in knowledge with regard to the current Barry Farm community, **which precluded a comprehensive understanding of adverse impacts.**"

I'm attaching to my testimony a letter from Pastor Monica Raines of Christ United Methodist Church in SW. She was surprised to learn that the Office of Planning proposed a FLUM change for her church property without their knowledge or consent. When asked, Director Trueblood told her that the change will not have no affect on the church – but she refutes that in her letter.

But how can Director Trueblood make that clam without any proof or analysis? Our experience is that changing the Future Land Use Map creates more development pressure on the site, increases land speculation and

inflates land values. Shouldn't there be some more analysis done about these impacts before we change land use maps. How many properties across the city has the Office of Planning recommended for change without the knowledge and consent of landowners?

Additionally, I register my concerns with the entire Comprehensive Plan process. Just because something has taken a lot of time and there have been a lot of meetings does not mean that there has been substantive and meaningful engagement of impacted people. The statute requires the Office of Planning to report on the status of Comp Plan policies annually, to justify substantial amendments, and to engage in "continuous community input." This has simply not happened.

The DC Grassroots Planning Coalition has spent 4 years pouring over these documents, and hundreds of hours proposing changes that address equitable development. Even still we feel that the Comp Plan as presented and the process itself have fatal flaws. The entire thrust and intent behind the Office of Planning's changes to the Comp Plan are to further the Mayor's development agenda – that same agenda that has displaced over 40,000 Black DC residents and worsened DC's racial inequities. The changes they propose are based on false and unproven claims and they do not identify how these changes will improve conditions for low-income Black residents specifically.

When the Council Office on Racial Equity releases their Racial Equity Impact Assessment we expect you will be confronted with a challenge – will you pass a racist Comp Plan? We expect that if the REIA is done with integrity, it will identify widespread issues throughout the Plan that will be difficult to address. If this is the case, you should consider scraping the amendment and starting over with the upcoming rewrite.

Finally, I want to suggest some areas of consideration to improve DC's planning in general. We need to make the Planning agency more independent of, not subordinate to the Mayor. Possibly moving to an appointed planning commission approved by the Council, or a body elected by the public, will make the planning agency more responsive to the public.

We need to create avenues for community-led planning. Communities need to have more tools, resources and opportunity to initiate a planning process – outside of advocating for money in the budget for the next fiscal year. With

clear guidelines, community-led plans that incorporate meaningful engagement of residents should be able to be adopted or otherwise regarded as an official representation of community priorities.

In summary – the Office of Planning, using the court’s own words, has failed to demonstrate a “comprehensive understanding of adverse impact.” This rings true whether we are talking about OP’s role in zoning proceedings or in the Comprehensive Planning process. Serious overhaul is necessary if we are to have a planning agency that helps DC become a truly inclusive and racially equitable city.



To: Charles Allen, Phil Mendelson, and Andrew Trueblood

Re: The Proposed Land Use Change of Christ United Methodist Church

It has come to our attention that someone has requested that the land Christ United Methodist Church sits on is proposed for a "land use change." No one consulted us of this proposed land use change. It is disheartening for us to learn that people who do not own our land can suggest changes of **how** the land is used.

We were told that this proposed change "will not change anything" – but that is not true.

Developers who desire to develop our land have started to contact us, which we have rejected outright. Changing the land use on the Comprehensive Plan will only encourage more developers to continue to harass us for our land. We are the ones that have to take those phone calls. We are the ones that have to deal with the hassle. Thus, we wish that our land use "status" remain as it is.

We know that the District is heavily interested in development, and we know that it is in your best interest to change the land use of our church. We know that the developers of Southwest DC want 4th Street SW to be full of shiny new buildings, and we are aware that our church, built in 1963, is not a shiny new building. With all the new buildings coming to Southwest, in a few years, Christ United Methodist Church will be the oldest building sitting on 4th Street SW.

We believe that this is why the designers of the Comprehensive Plan desire to change the density of the land we own at 4th and I Streets, SW. They are hoping that we will cave and re-develop our land to match all of the new development happening in our area.

This Land Use Change is a violation of our moral rights.

I am sure that you are aware of the history of racial gentrification of Southwest DC, where thousands of African Americans were forced to leave their homes. It happened because of a Comprehensive Plan. It happened because government officials allowed it. It happened because government officials did not listen to the citizens who owned the land.

I ask you this day: Have we learned anything from our history?

We anticipate your support as we rectify this matter.

Respectfully,

Rev. Monica Raines, Pastor
Christ United Methodist Church



DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA GOVERNMENT
ADVISORY NEIGHBORHOOD COMMISSION 5D

RESOLUTION OPPOSING IVY CITY FLUM CHANGES IN THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

Whereas Ivy City is a small historic residential community founded in 1872, and;

Whereas Ivy City has experienced intensified development over the last decade with rapidly increasing housing costs and land values, and;

Whereas Ivy City’s lower income predominantly Black residents face displacement due to gentrification, and;

Whereas future development must be carefully balanced to ensure that community needs for green spaces and recreation are met, affordable housing is secured, and the impact of new development on the surrounding community is considered, and;

Whereas ANC 5D, in response to the Office of Planning’s solicitation of proposed amendments to the Comprehensive Plan, requested that the Future Land Use Map (FLUM) for the Crummell School reflect uses for Local Public Facilities and Parks, Recreation and Open Space, but the Office of Planning rejected the ANC’s request, and;

Whereas, at the request of developers, the Office of Planning accepted changes to the Future Land Use Map for the Crummell School site, as well as two adjoining sites that cumulatively comprise a full city block in the small Ivy City neighborhood, and;

Whereas the ANC has received no notice or information from these property owners and developers about their plans for these sites, and;

Whereas the proposed FLUM change from Production and Technical Employment (PROTECH) to PROTECH/Residential -Medium could undermine the community’s ability to negotiate community benefits including affordable housing units during a Planned Unit Development Process and;

Whereas Ivy City currently has no Small Area Plan, crafted with community input, to guide development:

Therefore, be it resolved:

- **ANC 5D is opposed to the Office of Planning’s proposed change to the Future Land Use Map for the Crummell School site at 1900 Gallaudet St NE and the adjoining properties at 1355 Okie St, NE and 1900 Fenwick St, NE**
- **ANC 5D directs the DC Council, with leadership from Ward 5 Councilman Kenyan McDuffie and Council Chairman Phil Mendelson, to remove the FLUM changes prior to final passage of the Comprehensive Plan**
- **ANC 5D requests that the DC Council direct the Office of Planning to complete a Small Area Plan for the Ivy City community to guide future development.**

ANC 5D Commissioners 2019-2020	5D01: Ryan Linehan <i>Secretary & Treasurer</i>	5D02: Keisha Shropshire	5D03: Steve Motley
5D04: Bernice Blacknell	5D05: Sydelle Moore <i>Vice Chairperson</i>	5D06: Vacant	5D07: Clarence Lee <i>Chairperson</i>



**DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA GOVERNMENT
ADVISORY NEIGHBORHOOD COMMISSION 5D**

This letter was presented by Commissioner Linehan before ANC 5D at a duly noticed public meeting on December 8, 2020. ANC 5D is composed of 7 Commissioners such that 4 Commissioners constitute a quorum. With [5] Commissioners present, ANC5D voted [5] (Yea) [0] (Nay) [0] (Abstain).

Chairperson, ANC 5D

Secretary, ANC 5D

ANC 5D Commissioners 2019-2020	5D01: Ryan Linehan <i>Secretary & Treasurer</i>	5D02: Keisha Shropshire	5D03: Steve Motley
5D04: Bernice Blacknell	5D05: Sydelle Moore <i>Vice Chairperson</i>	5D06: Vacant	5D07: Clarence Lee <i>Chairperson</i>



**DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA GOVERNMENT
ADVISORY NEIGHBORHOOD COMMISSION 5D**

RESOLUTION ON THE RENOVATION OF CRUMMELL SCHOOL

Whereas the Alexander Crummell School at 1900 Gallaudet St, NE is a DC historic landmark, added to the National register of Historic Places in 2003, and;

Whereas the Crummell School operated as an elementary school for Black children from 1911 – 1977 when it was closed, and;

Whereas the Crummell School also served as a site for DC Parks and Recreation programs, and other civic activities, and was regarded as the “heart of Ivy City” and;

Whereas since the closing of the Crummell School the Ivy City community has had no community center, park or play spaces for youth and adults, and;

Whereas the Ivy City community has long advocated that the Crummell School be restored as a community center and it’s two-acre site turned into a park and playground, and;

Whereas Ivy City’s lack of trees and green spaces has contributed to poor air quality, high heat, and decreased quality of life for Ivy City residents, and;

Whereas Mayor Bowser released a Request for Proposals for the development of the Crummell School and its site and made a selection of a developer in November, 2016, with the commitment that the Crummell School would be renovated by the developer and would be maintained for public use, and;

Whereas because of community opposition to the developer’s proposed plan, which would not have provided parks and play spaces, the “surplus and disposition” of the site was never approved by the DC Council, nor has the plan been approved by the Zoning Commissioner or the DC Historic Preservation Board, and;

Whereas the selected development team of ProFish, Stonebridge and Jarvis have provided no updates to the community on the status of the project since February, 2019, and;

Whereas the Ivy City community has waited for four years with still unmet needs while the development project has stalled, and;

Whereas the DC Council included \$1million in its fiscal year 2021 city budget for the DC Parks and Recreation to provide recreational services on the Crummell School site

Be it resolved that ANC 5D calls on Mayor Muriel Bowser, her designees in the Deputy Mayor for Planning and Economic Development, and the DC Council to:

ANC 5D Commissioners 2019-2020	5D01: Ryan Linehan <i>Secretary & Treasurer</i>	5D02: Keisha Shropshire	5D03: Steve Motley
5D04: Bernice Blacknell	5D05: Sydelle Moore <i>Vice Chairperson</i>	5D06: Vacant	5D07: Clarence Lee Chairperson



**DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA GOVERNMENT
ADVISORY NEIGHBORHOOD COMMISSION 5D**

- Decouple the renovation of Crummell School from any future private development on the site
- Move forward with a city-funded full renovation of the Crummell School as a community center, and create a public park and play space on at least half of the site
- Allocate necessary funds to achieve this renovation in the fiscal year 2022 city budget, at least \$20 million
- Revisit possible development of the remaining portion of the site after public needs are addressed

This resolution presented by Commissioner Linehan came before ANC 5D at a duly noticed public meeting on November 10, 2020. ANC 5D is composed of 7 Commissioners such that 4 Commissioners constitute a quorum. With 5 Commissioners present, ANC5D voted **[5] (Yea)** [0] (Nay) [0] (Abstain).

Chairperson, ANC 5D

Secretary, ANC 5D

ANC 5D Commissioners 2019-2020	5D01: Ryan Linehan <i>Secretary & Treasurer</i>	5D02: Keisha Shropshire	5D03: Steve Motley
5D04: Bernice Blacknell	5D05: Sydelle Moore <i>Vice Chairperson</i>	5D06: Vacant	5D07: Clarence Lee Chairperson