

11/19/20 Testimony of Barbara Kahlow in Brooke Pinto's Roundtable
on B23-736, Comprehensive Plan Amendment Act of 2020

Last Thursday, I testified before the City Council on behalf of the West End Citizens Association (WECA) in opposition to the Office of Planning's (OP's) proposed 1,500-page bill to amend the DC Comprehensive Plan (Comp Plan). I discussed objections to: (a) widespread upzoning – much of it by unprofessional spot zoning – to allow out-of-scale development projects which are incompatible with existing low-density residential zoning; (b) 3-fold expansion of the downtown (including into part of Foggy Bottom-West End) at the cost of environmental protection analyses and affordable housing which should be in all parts of DC; and (c) protection of Federal-DC land in Foggy Bottom which was statutorily deemed and then retained as permanent parkland in each past Comp Plan since 1994.

Tonight, I will focus on our third objection – the threat to the permanent Foggy Bottom parkland. The WECA asked for retaining current law which, since 1994, has defined the publicly-owned Federal and DC land¹ between M Street and Virginia Avenue and between 26th and 29th Streets as permanent parkland and which specifies that this land shall not be used for development. The WECA is opposed to OP's proposed revision to current law [*in §2115.10 (renumbered as §2115.11), Policy NNW-2.5.4, West End/Foggy Bottom Parkland*] by removing the protective provision that the parkland “shall be retained as parkland and shall not be used for development or highways.” This is flatly unacceptable!

This parkland is surrounded by Federal highways with multiple ramps and – contrary to the assertion by the landowners of three isolated townhouses who would profit economically from a change in law – the land is not all DC-owned. In fact, the parkland has complicated ownership with multiple parcels owned by the Federal government and others owned by DC (see my footnote). In addition, this entire parkland area has a complicated and lengthy history which resulted in studied decisions where Federal highways and ramps could and should be placed.

The WECA also opposes OP's addition that the parkland shall be “part of a larger study on open space accessibility, transportation infrastructure reconfiguration, urban fabric reconfigurability for Foggy Bottom” and also recommends removal in its entirety of OP's new §2115.12, Policy NNW-2.5.5, Study Potential for Removing Highway Infrastructure in Foggy Bottom,” and new §2115.15, Action NNW-2.5.C, “Foggy Bottom River, Park, and Cultural Access Study.” **The WECA strongly recommends that the Council retain** the current statutory language in its entirety which has protected this Federal and DC parkland since 1994 **and delete all of OP's proposed drastic and impractical changes** in §§2115.11, 2115.12 and 2115.15. The Foggy Bottom-West End community, especially the surrounding community, is united in its opposition to any new development in this permanent parkland area.

In addition, there are other Comp Plan proposals which could adversely affect other parts of Foggy Bottom. For example, a lawyer proposed upzoning the large Columbia Plaza compound (Square 33) for high density commercial use. In reading her pre- and post-hearing submissions, it revealed that the objective is to rebuild the complex which would most probably turn this

¹ The permanent parkland area is complicated and includes several Squares. For example, 2 of them are: (a) Square 0001 with 6 lots - 2 federally-owned (Lots 0843 & 0848), 3 DC-owned (Lots 0847, 0849 & 0850), & 1 with unknown ownership (Lot 0840); and (b) Square 0004W which is all federally-owned except 1 DC-owned lot (Lot 0811).

middle-income residential complex with many rent-controlled units into another market-rate housing complex and with more commercial use than presently. This would be contrary to one of the Mayor's objectives to provide more, not less affordable housing – especially for those at the low end of the income scale.