

GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

ADVISORY NEIGHBORHOOD COMMISSION 3A



RESOLUTION REGARDING DRAFT DEVELOPMENT GUIDELINES FOR WISCONSIN AVENUE NW

In October 2023, the District of Columbia Office of Planning (OP) issued Draft Development Guidelines for the Wisconsin Avenue corridor, covering the area from Western Avenue in Friendship Heights through Tenley Circle to Rodman Street NW in ANC 3A. The Development Guidelines are intended to implement the provisions of the update of the DC Comprehensive Plan that was approved by the DC Council in fall 2021. As part of the process, OP staff has conducted presentations, listening sessions, and surveys of residents to gather their perspectives through the past year, and is asking for public comments.

The Draft Development Guidelines were also the subject of a “virtual” information forum held on November 2 for the community, jointly sponsored by ANC 3A and ANC 3E, which included presentations by OP and time for questions and comments. More than 100 individuals participated in that forum, including ANC Commissioners. At the November 2 forum, the OP representatives expressed a hope to finalize the guidelines by early 2024 and then prepare a proposed set of map amendments to adjust the zoning of all the properties within the planning area covered by the Draft Development Guidelines. The map amendments would determine what is “matter of right” development for each property. OP has also suggested that a Design Review process could be required for all projects in the proposed high density zones along Wisconsin Avenue proposed near the Friendship Heights Metro and Tenleytown Metro, which would provide opportunities for ANC and public comments and an order by the Zoning Commission incorporating design considerations that are binding on the property owner.

The maps in the draft shows the area south of Tenley Circle as part of a moderate density Mixed Use Zone, with maximum height of 75 feet. The draft highlights opportunities for:

- new infill buildings with street-facing uses for shopping and safer, more comfortable walking;
- a significant amount of new housing for households of varying sizes and compositions;
- improved crosswalks along Wisconsin to connect City Ridge and Upton Place with Tenleytown Metro;
- better utilization of surface parking lots;
- transforming public land at Tenley Circle and Veazey Triangle Park to be inviting spaces for public gathering and enjoyment.

These sound like potentially attractive prospects for current and prospective residents, businesses, institutions, and people who work, study, or visit the area. businesses and other community members. We hope the plan would also respect the habitat and character of the National Park land at the entrance to Glover Archbold Park on Van Ness Street, with appropriate transition from development on Wisconsin.

For the entire corridor, the draft focuses on creating opportunities for construction of new residential units, with particular emphasis on increasing the number of affordable units. If the Zoning Commission approves map amendments to “upzone” property on Wisconsin Avenue, as a result of the proposed Development Guidelines, the area covered by the amendments would be subject to the District’s “IZ+” program, which increases Inclusionary Zoning requirements to as much as 20% of the residential area in the project, with provisions for somewhat lower shares depending on the nature of the construction. It is our understanding that would apply to proposed new projects involving 10 or more residential units. That appears to include new construction, redevelopment of existing residential buildings, conversion of existing commercial office buildings to residential, or mixed use projects such as buildings with commercial on the first floor and residential above.

The number of affordable units required under IZ+ does not equate to as many units as the Mayor has established as the proportionate share for Ward 3 but we hope through effective planning and work with developers, it will be possible to create additional affordable units beyond those required by IZ or IZ+.

The ANC supports OP's objectives to pursue affordable housing, safer and better links to transportation, and improved parks and recreation opportunities, and build on other development guidelines including:

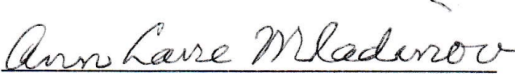
- zoning and design criteria that incorporate features proposed in the Draft Development Guidelines such as massing, step downs to provide a transition to adjoining low-rise residential areas, and open spaces;
- incorporation of streetscaping, shared streets and plazas and other amenities in the guidelines as part of Public Space Committee permitting process;
- encouragement for property owners, ANCs and community members to participate in effective Design Review processes for projects where the proposed density would be significantly higher than currently allowed, including mandatory Design Review for the areas around Metro station as OP proposes;
- avenues for the public and ANCs to submit comments on proposed projects as part of such a review;
- clear mechanisms for having the results of a Design Review incorporated in the plans for a proposed project, which would be enforceable under zoning orders and run with the land.

Planned Unit Development (PUDs) would appear to be unlikely in areas where the allowable density is significantly increased beyond what is currently allowed. That would mean that ANCs would not have the ability to negotiate public amenities with developers, which has been a primary means for local ANCs to participate in planning and help achieve design features such as plazas and green space in new projects and other community benefits. We would recommend a means for encouraging property owners to go through a PUD process when they are assembling multiple parcels or otherwise participate in a planning process with the community for very large and complex multi-use projects involving major potential public features.

We look forward to seeing the final Development Guidelines and having the opportunity for ANCs and members of the public to comment on proposed zoning provisions that would be applicable on the Wisconsin Avenue corridor in the future.



Chair



Secretary

The Commission approved this resolution by a vote of 5 - 0 at a duly-noticed public meeting on November 14, 2023, at which a quorum was participating. (Three of the five Commissioners constitute a quorum.) By this same vote, the Commission designated the Chair or his designee to represent the Commission on this matter.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION: DRAFT WISCONSIN AVENUE DEVELOPMENT GUIDELINES

The draft Wisconsin Avenue Development Framework proposed by the DC Office of Planning is designed to advance implementation of the land use and housing policies set out in the DC Comprehensive Plan, with a focus on urban design that guides future changes to the built environment. The “Comp Plan” amendments approved in 2021 call for allowing “greater heights and densities in mixed use development in the Rock Creek West Planning Area in support of citywide housing equity goals.”

The area covered by OP’s draft covers the Wisconsin Avenue corridor between Western Avenue in Friendship Heights in ANC 3E south to Rodman Street south of Tenley Circle in ANC 3A.

The draft guidelines set out four guiding principles for the Wisconsin Avenue corridor:

1. Prioritize housing, especially affordable housing, supported by active retail, restaurants, and cultural/entertainment uses.
2. Design public spaces to encourage walkability, connectivity, and access to transit.
3. Design building massing and height to complement the existing neighborhood context and emphasize local landmarks.
4. Design buildings to maximize the availability, variety, flexibility, and sustainability of housing and retail.

The draft proposes four different zones or levels of development in the corridor:

Friendship Heights Metro Zone High Density Maximum height: 130 feet; FAR (IZ+): 9.0

Friendship Heights Transition Zone Moderate Density Maximum height: 50 feet; FAR (IZ+): 2.16 for residential redevelopment between Garrison and Harrison Streets as well as on the west side of the future Western Bus Garage, providing a transition to lower-scale neighborhoods.

Tenleytown Metro Zone High Density Maximum height: 110 feet; FAR (IZ+): 7.8

Mixed Use Corridor Zone (mostly infill, between the Metro stations and south of Tenley Circle) Medium Density Maximum height: 75 feet; FAR (IZ+): 5.4

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

The Draft Development Guidelines emphasize creating opportunities for construction of new residential units, with particular emphasis on increasing the number of affordable units. Currently proposed developments with more than 10 or more new residential units are covered by the District’s Inclusionary Zoning requirements. Standard Inclusionary Zoning calls for between 8% and 12.5% of a building’s residential area to be devoted to affordable housing. Under IZ+, the requirement for affordable housing is higher, up to 20% of the residential area, with some adjustments to allow the share to be 16% or 18%.

If the Zoning Commission approves map amendments to “upzone” property on Wisconsin Avenue, as a result of the proposed Development Guidelines, the area covered by the amendments would be subject to the District’s “IZ+” program, which increases Inclusionary Zoning requirements to as much as 20% of the residential area in the project, with provisions for lower shares depending on the nature of the construction.

The current IZ+ requirements cover new residential construction, redevelopment of existing residential buildings for residential or mixed use such as buildings with commercial on the first floor and residential above, and conversion of existing commercial office buildings to residential or mixed use.

PROJECT DESIGN OPTIONS

The Draft Development Guidelines include maps and sketches of a series of urban design possibilities for the Wisconsin Avenue Corridor, including contemporary architecture with balconies and plazas and outdoor areas, streetscaping, wide sidewalks with benches and plantings, plazas, parks and open spaces, shared use streets/alleys OP writes in the draft guidelines: “To achieve the urban design vision of this Development Framework, OP will work with property owners and developers whenever possible. Available zoning tools include the PUD process and the existing Design Review process.”

With Planned Unit Developments (PUDs), owners of properties proposed for development can apply to construct a larger project than would otherwise be allowed (often referred to as “bonus density”) in exchange for agreeing to community amenities negotiated with nearby residents and the affected Advisory Neighborhood Commission(s). As OP and others noted at the November 2 forum, with the increased building heights and density proposed in the Draft Development Guidelines, property owners would probably be unlikely to propose a PUD, because they would be able to build large projects on the Wisconsin Avenue corridor as a “matter of right,” which would not involve any negotiation over community amenities.

Generally when a property owner proposes a project that is considered “matter of right” under the zoning regulations, the project is not subject to a zoning case and there is no formal request for comments from the public or the affected ANC(s). There is no provision in the current law or regulations for requesting community amenities or changes in project plans for a “matter of right” development.

OP has suggested that in addition to Inclusionary Zoning requirements, there could be other criteria included in the way the proposed zoning language would be written, to encourage developers to work toward the urban design objectives set out in the draft. It would seem clear that zoning for the corridor could include building height, lot occupancy, Floor Area Ratios, and setbacks from the street or property lines. The Draft Development Guidelines also sets out examples of suggested massing for buildings along the Wisconsin Avenue corridor, including step-downs to provide for transition to an adjoining residential zone. Potentially some of those elements could be reflected in the zoning regulations or could be made elements in a Design Review. The draft includes renderings and maps illustrating plazas, shared use streets, and other design features to make the corridor more aesthetically attractive, provide more open space, and create more vibrant, livable, walkable communities, which OP would like to encourage in the development process.

In the Draft Development Guidelines and information forum, Design Review was presented as a way to achieve the goals and urban design vision incorporated in the guidelines. The draft guidelines note that “Design Review, as currently described in the zoning regulations, could be applied to the high-density mixed-use areas such as the Friendship Heights Metro Zone and Tenleytown Metro Zone. The purpose of Design Review is to promote high-quality, contextual design, by allowing for review against specified criteria as identified in this Framework. The process entails a public hearing with review and approval by the Zoning Commission.” The hearing would provide opportunities for members of the community and affected ANC(s) to submit comments on a proposed project subject to Design Review. Provisions emerging from a Design Review could be adopted by the Zoning Commission in its order approving the project and would be administered by Department of Buildings through the building permit process.

The current process for project proposals allows for other options, such as PUDs, Voluntary Design Review, and Large Tract Review. It does not appear from the draft and other information that projects proposed for the corridor outside the highest density zones areas would be subject to public review or comment. But OP is suggesting that OP would try to work relevant guidelines into the text of the proposed zoning regulations for the length of the corridor covered by the draft, where possible, and public

space-related guidelines could be administered and enforced through the DDOT Public Space Committee review process, where public space permits are required.

OTHER DEVELOPMENT OBJECTIVES

The Draft Development Guidelines also indicate several areas on the Wisconsin Avenue corridor for parks and other space that would be available for public use. Several participants in the November 2 information forum recommended including additional space that could be used for events such as a farmers' market or other gathering area. There were also calls for recreation facilities and a community center. There is very little public property on or near the corridor so it would appear to be important for the District to give particularly careful attention to planning for how that property will be used and take maximum advantage of the opportunities for using space available for public purposes.

There were several comments at the November 2 information forum that as development of additional housing occurs on the Wisconsin Avenue corridor, supporting infrastructure will be needed, including local retail and public services such as utilities, as well as public schools, recreation facilities, and gathering places. It would be desirable for public purposes if the Development Guidelines support effective planning and improvements for those types of local infrastructure to serve the expected development and particularly the new residential units.

NOTE: In 2020, the Mayor established a goal of creating 12,000 new affordable housing units in the District by 2024, including 1,900 units in Ward 3. In 2022 last, the District estimated that close to 1,000 affordable units had been created in Ward 3, which was well short of the target. In succeeding years, Ward 3 would be expected to achieve higher targets for affordable units. If approximately 10% of new residential units were affordable under standard IZ and there were a total of 5,000 new units covered by those requirements, the number of affordable housing units could amount to 500. With a 20% requirement, the number of affordable units built could potentially be as high as 1,000 affordable units. Still, the total affordable units created in Ward 3 would continue to fall short of goals.

The affordable units required under the District's IZ+ program are supposed to be priced to be affordable for families making 60% of the median annual household income if they are rental units, or 80% of the median annual household income if they are units offered for sale. The requirement does not extend to units for households making 50% of MFI, or 30% of MFI or below. Since units at less than 50% MFI would almost certainly need to be subsidized to be included in a proposed project, they would probably not be built in developments where projects are designed to meet IZ+ requirements. That would mean that many households with workers earning between minimum wage and about \$50,000 per year, including a large share of "essential workers," would not be able to afford housing units built under IZ+, and housing affordable to them as well as to families with severely low income would not be built on the Wisconsin Avenue corridor as part of projects aimed at meeting IZ+ requirements.

In the IZ+ program, there are also no requirements for units large enough for families, such as units with 3 bedrooms. To date, studio apartments and one-bedroom units have been the most common size in many new residential projects on major corridors in the District. To achieve affordable units with 3 or more bedrooms and enough space for families generally requires additional funding or incentives.