

GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
ADVISORY NEIGHBORHOOD COMMISSION 3A



Resolution RE Proposed Text Amendment ZC 25-11 Rear Additions

We appreciate the opportunity to comment on the proposed text amendment ZC 25-11 affecting Rear Additions to row homes and semi-detached homes in R and RF zones. Our Commission area has many homes that would come under the provisions of this text amendment, and it is important for the Commissioners to consider the options available to residents interested in constructing additions at their homes or living in adjoining homes that could be affected.

We also greatly appreciate the information sessions scheduled by the District Office of Planning (OP) to present the proposed changes, take comments and questions, and discuss potential options. This is an important part of the outreach on changes in zoning, and we have been impressed by the responsiveness of OP staff and grateful for the chance to participate.

With the large number of residents in our area who would like to be able to “age in place,” it is particularly valuable to have the District facilitate that process by considering ways to allow more households to accommodate seniors, people with disabilities, and anyone who is relying on a wheelchair or other assistive mobility device for maintaining their ability to move safely when they are at home.

The concept of a “Universal Bedroom” large enough to allow comfortable movement of a wheelchair can make a significant improvement in the ability to meet those needs, and it would be a benefit to many households to be able to build an addition on the first floor that would accommodate a Universal Bedroom. We understand from the OP Setdown Report that a space of 15 feet by 16 feet is considered necessary for a Universal Bedroom, which is why OP recommended increasing the maximum size of a rear addition as a “matter of right” to 16 feet beyond the rear wall of the adjoining home(s) in the proposed text amendment.

In OP’s Information Session on ZC 25-11 on October 7, several ANC Commissioners asked if the text amendment increasing the matter-of-right size of a rear addition to 16 feet beyond the rear wall of the adjoining home(s) could be applied only to the first floor of the addition, because a Universal Bedroom would almost always have to be on the first floor (or in a daylight basement) in order to ensure access for a wheelchair without the obstacle of stairs. Several ANC Commissioners at that meeting suggested that the matter-of-right depth of a rear addition above the first floor could be kept at the existing 10 feet beyond the rear wall of the adjoining home(s), in order to avoid significant adverse effects on light and air and privacy of the homes and rear yards of adjoining homes, which are key elements in a Special Exception case. They were concerned that the original provision to increase that maximum to 16 feet for rear additions on all floors would restrict the right of neighbors or ANCs to review, comment, and get regulatory relief under the Special Exception standards for many larger additions that could have significant adverse effects on light and air and privacy. OP staff said that suggestion would be part of its report to the Zoning Commission for the hearing.

In the Final Report to the Zoning Commission in this proceeding which was filed on October 17, OP recommends a change in the provisions of the text amendment, to allow an addition of 16 feet beyond the rear wall of the adjoining home(s) as a matter of right only on the first floor, and to allow an addition of 12 feet beyond the rear wall of the adjoining home(s) on the floors above that (potentially the second and third floors).

OP staff stated at the Information Session on October 7, 2025, that adding 6 more feet to the matter-of-right size of a rear addition would not be that impactful as it is equivalent to about the height of an average man, though it was not clear that would be a relevant measure of the likely impact. OP's Final Report states that a rear addition of 12 feet beyond the rear wall of the adjoining home(s) on levels above the first floor would allow for more comfortable space for a room than the existing matter-of-right maximum of 10 feet. There were no additional details to back that statement in the report, or any related comments or references to other sources to support the change from a maximum of 10 feet to 12 feet for second and third floor rear additions.

In response to a question about effects on light and shadow, OP staff at the October 7 Information Session said they had not conducted any shadow studies to assess the effect of the proposed 16-foot maximum compared to the existing 10-foot maximum. OP has not presented any further information on shadow studies in the intervening 10 days or other analysis of the potential adverse effects of additions of 16 feet beyond the rear wall of the adjoining home(s) on the first floor, 12 feet on second and third floors, or other combinations in comparison to the existing 10-foot maximum in the zoning regulations. It is our conclusion that no additional analysis was done on those issues.

We are aware that additions at the rear of an adjoining home can have significant effects on the use of neighboring properties, including light and air and privacy for the residents in their homes, rear decks, and rear yards. An extended rear addition to a semi-detached home within the ANC 3A Commission area, creating shadows throughout the rear yard and the rear of the house, was a major reason why the Zoning Commission adopted the existing regulations in ZC 14-11. In the interest of fostering fairer balance between neighbors, we are sympathetic with the interest in maintaining the 10-foot matter-of-right maximum beyond the rear wall of the adjoining home(s) for rear additions above the first floor, in the absence of further evidence to the contrary, and allowing neighbors the right to be heard on the potential adverse effects of a larger addition.

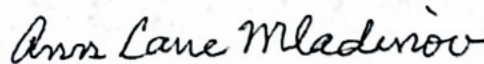
After reviewing all the proposals and comments, the ANC supports the proposal to facilitate construction of Universal Bedrooms by allowing rear additions of up to 16 feet beyond the rear wall of the adjoining home(s) on the first floor without a Special Exception.

Be it resolved that:

1. The Zoning Commission should adopt the proposed provision to revise the maximum to 16 feet beyond the rear wall of an adjoining home as a matter of right, as proposed in the text amendment ZC 25-11, for a rear addition on the first floor of row homes and semi-detached homes in the R and RF Zones.
2. The Zoning Commission should give further consideration to the proposal to change the maximum for rear additions above the first floor of row homes and semi-detached homes in the R and RF Zones as a matter of right, and should not adopt any increase in that maximum standard from the existing 10 feet beyond the rear wall of the adjoining home(s) without strong evidence of both the need for that change and the absence of potentially significant adverse consequences on the use of adjoining homes, based on additional analysis of light and air and privacy effects.



Chair



Secretary

This resolution was approved by the Commission by a vote of 3 - 2 at its duly noticed public meeting on October 21, 2025, at which a quorum was present. (Three of the five Commissioners constitute a quorum.) By this vote, the Commission also designates the Chair or his designee to represent the Commission on this matter.