



THE FUTURE OF MOUNT PLEASANT?

August 25, 2014

Dear Neighbor:

Our neighborhood is changing before our eyes. After decades of quiet obscurity, Mount Pleasant is being targeted by developers who are buying our historic housing stock and remaking those houses – one by one – as condominiums. Because of our large lot sizes, many of these properties may be legally expanded and divided into 3, 4 or more units “as a matter of right,” that is, with no consideration given to the impact on neighbors or the broader community. Every month it seems yet another property is converted to the maximum number of units allowed by law, increasing the population density of the neighborhood and gradually reducing its demographic diversity.

In response to complaints from residents of Mount Pleasant and elsewhere, the DC Office of Planning (OP) has now proposed to amend the zoning code to eliminate matter-of-right conversions of single-family residential buildings throughout the city. This would not affect houses currently classified as “apartment houses” (i.e., having 3 or more units). Nor would it change the fact that all houses in R-4 zones (such as Mount Pleasant) may have a second unit.

Most of our houses were built in the early twentieth century as single family dwellings, some with original basement apartments. If houses in Mount Pleasant were generally limited to two dwelling units as OP recommends, individual owners could decide whether to have a basement apartment or to divide the house in some other way to have two units. Conversions to three or more units, however, would require approval as a variance, as is the case in other residential house zones.

Mount Pleasant today is a highly desirable neighborhood with a diversity of housing types that attracts a diversity of residents. Single family houses are an important part of this mix. They accommodate different lifestyles and allow occupants to work from home or to age in place with live-in assistance. However, in the current housing market, these properties are being targeted by developers for conversion to the maximum number of units and maximum size allowable by law. Once converted to condominiums and divided ownership, it is unlikely that they will ever be reclaimed as single family homes – and the people who need such accommodations will gradually be displaced.

The Zoning Commission will be considering OP’s recommendation (and competing options) this fall. If Mount Pleasant residents demonstrate strong support for eliminating matter-of-right conversions, there is a good chance that – even if the citywide proposal is defeated – the Commission would grant such relief for our historic district. In the absence of such a showing, conversions will continue at an accelerating rate – and perhaps become subject to even more permissive rules.

The future of Mount Pleasant depends on our action today. Please sign our petition to support OP’s recommendation and help us protect the historic character of our neighborhood.

Very truly yours,
The HMP Board of Directors

HISTORIC MOUNT PLEASANT, 1731 Lamont Street NW, Washington, DC 20010
www.historicmountpleasant.org

Mount Pleasant Zoning Future

Current R-4 Zone

- Allows (since 1958) matter-of-right conversions of single family houses (detached, semi-detached, or attached)
 - 2 units for all, regardless of lot size
 - 3 units or more for every 900 square feet of lot area

Development Pressure:

- Mount Pleasant (MP) properties are increasingly attractive to developers who outbid other buyers, develop the maximum number of units, and move on

Why Mount Pleasant? Why now?

- Larger lot sizes (estimated 10% of MP homes on lot sizes larger than 2700 square feet= 3 or more units)
- Matter-of-right conversion authority only in R-4
- Conversion bonus for detached and semi-detached structures – can expand to 60% lot coverage
- Continued strength of DC housing market

Why does it matter?

- More historic MP houses converted to condos, likely never to be returned to single ownership
- Individuals against developers for MP properties
- Threat to historic character
- More demand for parking
- Decrease in green space, loss of trees (due to 60% conversion bonus)
- Less diversity of residents and housing options (pushing out group houses, home offices, extended family options)
- Large, inappropriate additions
- In conflict with the goals of Zoning Regulations R-4:
 - “...primary purpose shall be the stabilization of remaining one-family dwellings.” (330.2)
 - “...shall not be an apartment house district.” (330.3)
- In conflict with the DC Comprehensive Plan: “Maintain a variety of residential neighborhood types in the District, ranging from low-density, single-family neighborhoods to high-density, multi-family mixed use neighborhoods. The positive elements that create the identity and character of each neighborhood should be preserved and enhanced in the future.” Policy LU-2.1.1.

But, What about Density?

- R-4 zones are only 15% of residentially-zoned lands in the city.
- R-5 (apartment zones) make up 30% of residentially-zoned land with much greater density potential.
- 3500 acres of mixed-use land available city-wide for development also.

But, what about affordability?

- There are no Inclusionary Zoning requirements (affordability standards) for R-4 conversions.
- Average sales price of MP condos since January 2013 is just under \$600,000 (more than \$500/square foot).

Solution:

- Support the Office of Planning recommendation to eliminate matter-of-right conversions to 3 or more units for houses in R-4 (Zoning Commission Case No. 14-11).
 - Maintain 2 units by-right in all R-4 houses.
 - Allow conversions of non-residential structures (schools, churches, etc.) to 3 or more units.
- If above fails, support an amendment to limit conversions in the Mount Pleasant Historic District.

Show Your Support by Signing the Petition.