

August 3, 2020

Chris Ryer, Director
Baltimore City Department of Planning
417 East Fayette Street
Baltimore, MD 21202

Re: Preserving homeownership opportunities without off-street parking requirements

Dear Mr. Ryer,

This letter comes from the leaders of six Baltimore City neighborhood associations as a follow-up to the Planning Department's Webex meeting on June 15. At that meeting, you challenged us to come up with a way of protecting homeownership in center city neighborhoods without relying on requirements for off-street parking. This letter proposes such a way. It is the result of many conversations and much work, and it represents agreement from key neighborhood leaders in all of our neighborhoods. Two of our six associations have already voted to support this. We have the support of association leaders in the other four neighborhoods and are working to get the formal backing of our associations.

Our six neighborhoods are: Bolton Hill, Charles Village, Greenmount West, Madison Park, Mount Vernon-Belvedere, and Reservoir Hill. Our neighborhoods had 32,041 people in the 2010 Census and were 55.7% nonwhite.

Our neighborhoods share the following important characteristics:

- Center city location
- Low homeownership rates
- Row houses that are large enough to satisfy the bulk regulations for more than 2 dwelling units per house
- Diversity and inclusion

Other neighborhoods may share these characteristics and may want to join us.

When our neighborhoods are at their best, they offer the best of both worlds: enough homeowners for stability and maintenance, enough tenants for liveliness, youth, diversity, and a greater chance to support retail. But this ideal is not always attained. Even the most stable of our neighborhoods have extremely low rates of homeownership, and the rate is probably too low in some. Think of how worried people are because the City's homeownership rate has dipped below 50%. Here are the homeownership percentages for our neighborhoods:

| <u>Neighborhood</u> | <u>% Homeownership</u> |
|------------------------|------------------------|
| Bolton Hill | 26.8% |
| Charles Village | 16.6% |
| Greenmount West | 23.7% |
| Madison Park | 9.8% |
| Mount Vernon-Belvedere | 10.3% |
| Reservoir Hill | 23.6% |

It would help our neighborhoods to have more homeowners. At minimum, we need to maintain our current levels of homeownership.

Houses that offer an opportunity for homeownership are a scarce resource in our neighborhoods. And they are under constant threat from absentee landlords, because center city locations are attractive to renters, and houses in our neighborhoods are usually big enough to hold multiple apartments. While we are glad that our neighborhoods have lots of renters, we acknowledge, and we hope you understand, that we pay a price in the poor maintenance that absentee row house landlords usually provide.

Unlike large apartment buildings, row houses with apartments are not big enough to support on-site management and maintenance. Absentee landlords are usually small-scale, often amateurs, and almost always far away. Their buildings, and our neighborhoods, suffer from this.

For many years, our best protection against absentee landlords has been the Zoning requirements for off-street parking. Now that the Department is no longer seeking to enforce these requirements, and everyone wants Baltimore to become a less automotive city, we propose a very tightly targeted plan.

We welcome homeowners who wish, for whatever reason, to create second units in their houses, if those units comply with all other requirements of the Zoning Code. And we understand that some houses, particularly in Mount Vernon, are simply too large to be single-family houses or two-family houses.

Recommendation: Create a Homeownership Protection Overlay District that

- Prohibits the conversion of applicable buildings into more than two residential units
- Allows the conversion of applicable buildings into two units as of right if doing so meets all provisions of the Zoning Code
- Mandates that applicable buildings, if vacant for a year or more, revert to single-family regardless of prior uses

Buildings to which this applies

- Zoned R8-R10 or OR-2
- Large enough to meet the bulk regulations for more than two units
- Smaller than 4,500 square feet
- Built as single-family houses and not currently divided into apartments
- Built as single-family houses, and the most recent approved use was for offices only without residential units

Buildings to which this does not apply

- Buildings in C Zoning districts
- Buildings with storefronts
- Buildings that already had more than two residential units as of July 15, 2020

We are sending this letter to our City Council representatives and will endeavor to discuss it with them.

Thank you for your consideration,

Bolton Hill Community Association
David Nyweide, President

Greenmount West Civic Association
Lauren Kelly-Washington, President

Mount Vernon-Belvedere Association
Michelle Richter, President

Charles Village Civic Association
Kirsch Jones, President

Madison Park Improvement Association
Antoinette Peele, President

Reservoir Hill
Dale Terrill