

Testimony before the Hon. Phil Mendelson, Chairman
Committee of the Whole, Council of the District of Columbia

Regarding: **Support** for Bill 23-736, the “Comprehensive Plan Amendment Act of 2020”

By Cheryl Cort

Policy Director

November 12, 2020

Good morning, my name is Cheryl Cort and I am the Policy Director for the Coalition for Smarter Growth. We are members of the Housing Priorities Coalition, which has engaged in this process since it began four years ago. Together, we have urged the DC Council to pass the Comp Plan without delay.

The plan makes clear commitments to racial equity, equitable distribution of affordable housing, and expanded housing opportunities around transit. This update is urgently needed to encourage more inclusive neighborhoods, and begin to address the gaping racial disparities in housing and economic opportunity. Even now, more than a thousand affordable homes are stuck at the Zoning Commission, waiting for changes in the Comp Plan to move forward.

Some critics say that we need more public process. But we have had extensive public engagement over the last four years. CSG is committed to good public process, and the process has been robust and multifaceted. I’ve attended many of the meetings all over the city - from Deanwood to Tenleytown. Office of Planning provided additional outreach and extended comment deadlines. To let this process go on indefinitely – beyond four years and counting – is a disservice to the efforts of so many residents, ANC Commissioners and stakeholders who have been involved.

Our 2006 Comp Plan is woefully out of date and fails to give us the guidance we need to build a more just recovery, and address a legacy of discriminatory land use practices that have denied wealth, opportunity, and even health, to Black and Brown residents. The updated Comp Plan proposes to increase and equitably distribute housing options across the District, including setting goals for building more affordable homes in currently exclusive neighborhoods.

The Future Land Use Map (FLUM) changes are also crucial to our city’s ability to address future housing needs, and leverage new opportunities to create affordable housing. The map changes provide 15% more housing capacity, focused around transit stations and corridors. Complementing these map changes is the Expanded Inclusionary Zoning proposal at the Zoning Commission. This would require up to 20% set aside of affordable IZ units in the case of an upzoning. Given the potential increased value created by the map changes, the 20% set aside is a value capture policy that combines needed increases in housing capacity with additional affordability.

We are deeply concerned that the Comp Plan bill review could slip into next year and mean even greater delay. We need the plan update now to help guide city actions to foster a just recovery, restart stalled affordable housing plans, and guide more equitable affordable housing opportunities across the city into the future.

We urge you to pass the bill this calendar year.

Thank you for your consideration.