

PRESS RELEASE

Friends of McMillan Park

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Zoning Commission to VMP:

Significant Room for Improvement on Housing and Grocery

The DC Zoning Commission held the second of four formal hearings on Monday night focused on the housing and retail components of the Vision McMillan Partners (VMP) application to re-zone historic McMillan Park. During the over four-hour session, the Commission and Friends of McMillan Park's counsel hammered VMP on (1) architecture and construction plans, (2) senior housing, (3) affordable housing, and (4) retail aspirations.

"A rooftop terrace is a poor substitute for a backyard." EYA, the VMP partner known for its cookie-cutter townhomes built across the region, received the heaviest interrogation. The Commission expressed disappointment in the team's request for "relief" on rear yard requirements and noted the need for more time to get comfortable with the proposed design. Questions also focused on the quality of materials planned for the townhome façades. "A building that doesn't look good on the outside tends to reflect poorly on the whole plan," the Commission noted, citing several local projects for which EYA has earned a reputation for low-quality design and finishes.

"Have you considered your seniors?" The Commission expressed great concern about the level of planning underlying the proposed senior housing component. With elderly residents isolated in a building farthest away from the hospital and grocery store, worries mounted about the accessibility, safety, and social offerings of the facility. Noting that the new Evarts Street would essentially be a commercial loading dock adjacent to a driveway for the disabled, the Commission called the plan "unacceptable" and "a real disappointment." The Chair asked, "Are there any other opportunities for community other than sitting in the lobby and watching Dr. Oz?"

"We'd like to see closer to 30% of AMI." The scant affordable housing included in the VMP proposal would provide subsidies to residents earning roughly \$80,000 per year (80% of Area Median Income [AMI]), which fails to address the actual need of struggling families. The Commission stated that to be truly affordable, subsidies should target those earning 30% of AMI. During testimony, the Coalition for Smarter Growth criticized the affordable housing plan and suggested removing one of the two garage parking spaces planned per townhome unit to increase affordability for residents in need.

"Community support is contingent on the grocery store." The prospect of a grocery store at McMillan Park has been a consistent selling point for neighbors. Based on VMP testimony, the future of the grocery store is hopeful at best. "We would like the flexibility to include a non-grocery alternative retail option if needed," the team requested. The Commission sternly reminded VMP that community support depends upon a grocery store. Online comments echoed this sentiment: "I don't like hearing 'alternative retail' in lieu of a grocery store - if this gets built, then I want a grocery store there," said Scott Roberts of Bloomingdale. Stronghold resident, Sam Shipley, said, "Wait, what?! This is even an option? You've got to be kidding me! Why so many 'unknowns' with these guys?"

[McMillan Park zoning hearings](#) resume tonight at 6:30pm focused on the medical office building component of the proposal.

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