

BHCA Resolution on Housing and Housing Stock

Be it resolved that the Bolton Hill Community Association recognizes that a vibrant neighborhood is one with homeowners and renters of diverse household characteristics who live in a variety of types of housing: single-family row homes, multi-family row homes, condominiums, and apartment buildings.

Historically, many of Bolton Hill's large single-family row houses have been converted to multi-family row houses. These row houses were subdivided into apartments in the 1940s through 1960s in response to a growing city population, which declined from the 1970s onward, and today the number of dwelling units for renters far outnumbers those for homeowners. Under half of the buildings in the neighborhood are estimated to be owner-occupied, and off-street parking requirements have deterred developers from dividing even more single-family row houses into multi-unit row houses, thereby preserving a healthy balance of housing stock in the neighborhood. Developers who can afford to buy single-family row houses and convert them into more than two units often leave the building's tenants—and the neighborhood—with absentee landlords, who aren't involved in or care about the life of the community.

BHCA has supported off-street parking requirements for multi-unit buildings as a means to maintain a balance of housing stock, limit parking congestion on the streets, and deter absentee landlords from owning properties in Bolton Hill. BHCA supports the spirit of the alternative proposal to create an overlay district in the Baltimore City Zoning Code because it is a substitute for off-street parking requirements. BHCA would like the overlay district to prohibit both the conversion of single-family row houses into more than two units and the addition of more units to existing multi-unit row houses. BHCA supports provisions of the Zoning Code that deter historic row houses from being converted into multi-unit properties and will continue to support off-street parking requirements until they have a substitute that achieves the same end in the Baltimore City Zoning Code.

BHCA's support for the alternative proposal is not a statement in favor of homeowners over renters; nor is it a negative statement toward the renters or owners of existing multi-unit row homes; nor is it a statement against affordable housing. BHCA acknowledges that Bolton Hill residents in the past, like those in other predominantly white Baltimore neighborhoods, actively sought to exclude people of color from residing in Bolton Hill, and their efforts were reinforced by city, state, and federal laws and regulations. BHCA's support of the alternative proposal in no way reflects a desire to preserve Bolton Hill's predominantly white racial composition nor to prevent more people who are not white from living in Bolton Hill.

BHCA's traditional support of off-street parking requirements and more recently the alternative proposal is a statement of what BHCA believes is the best means of ensuring that Bolton Hill can continue to be a neighborhood for people with a variety of housing needs, be they single-bedroom apartments, homes large enough for a family, senior apartments, or housing for couples or roommates. BHCA reiterates its commitment to supporting and sustaining a welcoming community to people of all stages of life, regardless of their racial or ethnic background, nationality, religious beliefs, education or income level, sexual orientation, abilities, or gender identity.

Adopted March 2, 2021. May be changed or rescinded by a majority vote of the Board.

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

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