

# City's revised zoning code is topic for debate in historic Georgetown

By **CAROL BUCKLEY**  
Current Staff Writer

An ongoing rewrite of the city's zoning regulations for residential areas may not seem to be a surefire way to draw crowds during a holiday week, but Georgetowners thronged the Letelier Theater on Prospect Street Monday night to hear a debate concerning just that.

Three years of focus groups and initial hearings have led to the draft that, if approved by the Zoning Commission, will govern what homeowners, developers, business owners and institutions in residential areas may do with their properties, said

Travis Parker of the city's Office of Planning. Parker has led the massive undertaking of rewriting the city's zoning code — a document that has not been overhauled since 1958.

It's that last occupant — institutions — that concerned some of the attendees at Monday's event, sponsored by the Citizens Association of Georgetown.

Although Georgetown University's in-the-works — and controversial — campus plan will be weighed under existing zoning rules, the new regulations would apply to future plans.

Parker assured residents that one draft campus plan provision is likely to be modi-

fied for the final code.

As written now, the draft regulations would allow universities, hospitals and other institutions to allocate up to half of their property to ancillary uses, including retail.

"I used to think of this as the gift-shop exemption," said advisory neighborhood commission chair Ron Lewis. But 50 percent is clearly more than what's needed for a gift shop, he said.

The number is clearly not the right one, agreed Parker, who said a future draft of the rule would list a smaller proportion.

Under proposed rules, a university would also be able to add, shift or reprogram up to 3,500 square feet of new building space

without seeking a change to an approved campus plan.

But the bulk of changes would impact far more homeowners in Georgetown than institutions, and here Parker and his debate opponent, Nancy MacWood of the Committee of 100 on the Federal City, foresaw particularly different results from the proposed rules.

According to Parker, the new code would be simpler, easier for homeowners to understand and — crucially for a neighborhood like Georgetown — would eliminate the process that labels many historic properties in the city "nonconforming" and therefore easier to alter than preserve.

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## Gray pledges to boost city's early education

By **JESSICA GOULD**  
Current Staff Writer

Mayor-elect Vincent Gray has a date with President Barack Obama Dec. 1. And he already has one topic of conversation all planned out.

"You know one of the things I'm going to be talking about," he told a crowd at the National Press Club on Friday. "Early childhood education."

Gray, who championed universal pre-kindergarten legislation from his perch as D.C. Council chairman, said he plans to make early childhood education a top priority for his administration.

And he said he'd like to see the District become a national model for infant and toddler care. "I'm going to invite [the President] to look at what's being done here," he said, to a round of applause.

The advocacy group Pre-K for All D.C. sponsored Friday's forum, which celebrated the release of a new case study devoted to D.C.'s path toward universal pre-k — a journey in which the mayor-elect has played a leading role. In 2007, Gray introduced — and in 2008 the D.C. Council passed — the Pre-K Enhancement and Expansion Act, which promised 2,000 additional pre-k



Bill Petros/Current File Photo

**Mayor-elect Vincent Gray said he would like to see more emphasis on infant and toddler programs.**

slots by 2014.

As it turns out, the city met its goal early, Gray said — surpassing this fall the benchmark outlined in the legislation.

But Gray said the work is far from over, and he used the Friday discussion to lay out his vision for a birth-to-24 continuum of education services, with an emphasis on building capacity for new infant and toddler programs.

"I don't meet a lot of parents who don't want their children to do better," he said, adding that enhancing

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## Mayor-elect describes grim budget outlook

By **ELIZABETH WIENER**  
Current Staff Writer

With the District's projected budget shortfall for this fiscal year ballooning to \$188 million, Mayor-elect Vincent Gray announced two other certainties in tandem on Monday: He will not exclude any major category of taxes from a possible increase, and he will slap an immediate freeze on all capital projects not yet in the design or construction phase.

At what he called an "honest talk" about the grim budget situation, Gray told residents, "Everyone is going to have to take a hit and share in the sacrifice. I will not use shortsighted budget gimmicks to push the problem off until later."

The District government is required to balance its operating budget each year. But sagging revenues (down \$99.8 million from earlier projections) and overspending (up \$88.1 million) have already put the fiscal 2011 budget out of whack. Mayor Adrian Fenty's submitted his long-awaited gap-closing plan this week, and Gray said the

council must adjust and vote on it "in a very condensed period" before the end of December.

Among specific proposals, Gray noted that:

- property, income and sales taxes provide more than 80 percent of the District's local revenue, signaling that revenue cannot be meaningfully boosted "unless we target one or more of the major tax categories." Gray said "all options will be on the table," adding that "fee and fine increases are not an effective or long-term solution to increasing the District's revenue."

- capital expenditures, although budgeted separately, must be reduced by about \$120 million a year to stay within a self-imposed 12 percent debt cap. Gray said he will freeze all capital projects not yet under way, then quickly establish a "Blue Ribbon panel of capital experts" to prioritize projects.

Items consistent with city priorities "may be unfrozen with little or no delay" in their original timetable. "It's time we distinguish between the projects we need versus the projects that we want," Gray said.

- reserve funds have been whittled down by 57 percent over the past four years, as the nationwide recession reduced tax revenues while increasing social needs. Gray proposed setting aside \$50 million in reserve funds that would have been spent this year, holding them to cover "unforeseen pressures." But he also acknowledged the possibility that even that \$50 million might be spent if revenues decline further.

Given the short timetable, the council will hold a public hearing Nov. 30 on gap-closing plans. It must vote on a revised budget Dec. 7, and on a final budget support act Dec. 21, its last legislative meeting of the year.

Gray said the public is welcome to weigh in with ideas to solve the budget gap, but warned, "please let it be more than 'don't cut this or that,' without offering solutions."

He reiterated the dire message in remarks Monday night to the Dupont Circle Citizens Association.

"I wish I had better news," he said. "But I promised transparency, and that is what you'll get. ... It will be a formidable challenge."

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## CLUBS

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failure to provide clear ownership and building plan information, and general inappropriateness in the neighborhood.

"Now that there are so many young families that are moving in and staying, it is becoming a bigger problem," commissioner Jackie Blumenthal said in an interview.

The resolution points to the proximity of JP's to a playground, ballfield, and stores frequented by children and families.

The same night the commission voted against JP's, it voted neither to support nor oppose the liquor license for Good Guys. Commissioners attributed their neutrality to the establishment's long record of addressing neighborhood concerns, most recently by agreeing

to add security at earlier hours, they said.

Back in 2004, the commission expressed more overt support for the club's license.

"Their outstanding participation and generosity contributes to the strong sense of community spirit in Glover Park," read the commission's 2004 resolution, which urged the alcohol board to grant the license renewal.

The accolades were absent this time around, and the owner of Good Guys, who preferred not to be named in this article, said he was disheartened the commission did not explicitly support him.

"We consider ourselves part of this neighborhood. We're very proud of it," he said.

He said he still appreciates his establishment's relatively favorable image in Glover Park, particularly compared with JP's.

With JP's, the 2008 fire seems to have created an opening for doubts.

"The fact that the place burned down gave us the opportunity to question whether it should come back," said Blumenthal.

She said owner Papanicolas "has not worked as hard as Good Guys at being a good neighbor."

Two years ago the commission requested that the city dissolve the nightclub's active liquor license but did not succeed.

This time, it will be "tricky to try and see if we can have this [liquor license] pulled," Blumenthal said, "but we believe we have the grounds."

Milton Grossman, the lawyer who will represent the protesters, said he expects the JP's hearing date to be delayed due to placarding issues.

Staff writer Katie Pearce contributed to this report.

## PRESCHOOL

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education on the "front end" is the key to improving outcomes in elementary school, high school, college and careers.

"It just seems to me that turning around low-performing schools means turning around low-performing students before they get to kindergarten," Gray said.

He said he also wants to "put an end to the reality that 70 percent of the people who work in the District of Columbia do not live in the District of Columbia."

And while Gray acknowledged that the city's budget is tight right now, he noted that the District just won \$75 million in federal Race to the Top funds.

He said he sees no reason why some of those funds — which are to be used for standards, data systems, teachers and turn-around schools — can't be put toward early-education programs.

Gray said he envisions partnering with the University of the District of Columbia to boost opportunities for aspiring early-education teachers.

After all, he said, "If we focus now on those early investments ... as we move down the road, we won't be as fiscally challenged."

Sekou Biddle, who represents Ward 4 on the State Board of Education, is the executive director for Jumpstart for Young Children, a nonprofit that connects volunteers with children in a yearlong tutoring

program. He attended Friday's talk and said he welcomes Gray's emphasis on early childhood education.

"I think it's exactly the right thing," he said. "You have to have a strong foundation if you're going to be lifelong learner."

But, Biddle said, the question is how to give children the support they need in those crucial, early years. "The pathway is obvious," he said. "How we get there from here is the big question."

HyeSook Chung, executive director of the advocacy group DC Action for Children, said that while she welcomes Gray's ambitious vision, "it's too early to celebrate."

For instance, Chung said, the quality of the District's pre-k, infant and toddler programs should be improved. And she said some areas of the city are better served than others.

"It's exciting that the city wants to focus younger," she said. "But [existing] pre-k, infant and toddler programs still need to be strengthened."

Meanwhile, Biddle said Gray will have to decide whether he envisions a thoroughly public system, folded into D.C. Public Schools and charter schools, or whether he'll turn to a collection of public schools, community-based organizations and private providers, as outlined in the universal pre-k legislation.

"It's about creating a lot of dots for kids, and then in school we do a lot of the work of connecting those dots," Biddle said.

## GIANT

From Page 1

adviser to explore its development options going forward," Giant's vice president of real estate Guy Stutz said in an e-mailed statement.

"Our paramount concern is the long-term viability and success of the overall project and our store," he continued. "To reach this goal, we are trying to balance the interests of many stakeholders including our neighbors, existing businesses and potential future tenants."

The news is the second surprise to neighbors since Giant began moving forward with plans this fall for a 2011 groundbreaking. In September residents learned that instead of a two-phase building plan that would allow retail tenants to remain in place during construction, a single phase will require the eviction of all merchants from the site.

Like the two-phase plan — an assurance without an outright promise — the property's ownership did come up during zoning hearings. Company representatives told zoning commissioners that the grocer's parent company had the money to develop the site without an equity partner. What's more, operational details to be implemented by Giant for the entire site, including a touted truck-management plan, were discussed as part of the hearing.

For one group of neighbors suing over the city's approval of the Giant project, the recent announcements have a silver lining: With more residents doubting Giant's bona fides, raising questions about the development may not raise as much rancor.

"[Planning contractor] Street-Works did a very good job of linking concerns with opposition," said resident Jim Pickman, who along with some neighbors is appealing the Zoning Commission's approval of the project.

"We want the grocery," Pickman stressed. But we want to mitigate the adverse effects" of the development, he added.

That seemingly banal stance earns the appellants scorn from residents who say the zoning fight is over, Giant won, and the obstructionist opponents should simply accept defeat. Some neighbors also actively support the project's increased density, noting that more services and retail nearby will lead to a more walkable community.

But Pickman's fellow petitioners — who are appealing the decision under the aegis of the Wisconsin-Newark Neighborhood Coalition — say that they receive quiet support from neighbors who share their concern that the project is too dense, is inconsistent with the city's Comprehensive Plan, and will lead to a glut of traffic and even more parking woes in the area.

It's difficult to gauge area opinion from two local bellwethers that are staying mum — at least officially — on the appeal: the advisory neighborhood commission, which supported Giant's plan but with a list of conditions, some of which remain unmet; and the Cleveland

Park Citizens Association, which was a fellow opponent during last year's zoning hearings.

After a slate of candidates running on a pro-Giant platform lost a hard-fought battle for leadership posts within the association, the group did not file an appeal of the zoning decision they had fought against, nor have they taken a position on the existing appeal.

Since the case is now in the court system and not before the zoning board, the association is no longer a party in the matter, and its opinion would have "no bearing" on the appeal, wrote association president Susie Taylor in an online forum.

Pickman and his allies hope to achieve their goal — mitigating the development's impacts — in a hearing that they understand will be in the first quarter of 2011. "We didn't want to delay anything," he said, but the hearing date is close enough that the appellants think they can "get it resolved" fairly quickly.

Some of the arguments that appellants will produce at that hearing will be fairly abstruse — that the approved development is inconsistent "several times over" with the city's Comprehensive Plan, for example, or that the Zoning Commission overstepped its authority in canceling the neighborhood's overlay district at the request of Giant representatives.

But other arguments are more concrete. Just ask Philip Montalto, an appellant whose Idaho Avenue home will be separated from a grocery store loading dock by little more than a wooden fence if the project is built as proposed.

And here Giant has taken some steps in the right direction, Montalto noted. Giant official Stutz has visited his home several times, appearing once with engineers and again with alternate drawings that would pull the loading dock driveway away from Montalto's home, as well as several others. Although encouraged by the progress, Montalto said there's been no word for months.

But the use of Idaho Avenue at all for two-way truck traffic is problematic, according to the appellants' argument. The D.C. Department of Transportation noted in its testimony that Idaho Avenue would be suitable for deliveries because it's about 50 feet wide. Nearby streets wouldn't work because of their size, department representatives said.

When it came out during the hearing that the street is only 36 feet — and narrower than some area streets — the Transportation Department maintained its conclusion that the street can handle two-way truck traffic.


And that just won't do, say the appellants, who don't blame Giant for requesting what they say is the moon so much as they fault the city for handing it to them.

Stutz was not available for an interview. In the past, Giant has declined to comment on the appeal.

Though Giant points out it's made many compromises, Montalto said more would have yielded a better plan and a better project.

"There are costs to what they've come up with," he said.

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