

Testimony City Council Bill 25-0064

Hearing: City Council Land Use and Transportation Committee.

There are some major questions concerning City Council Bills 25-0064.

- Why this bill and why now?
- Whom does the bill benefit?
- How will these measures contribute to improving the quality of life and the well-being of existing residents and neighborhoods affected by the proposed zoning changes?
- How does this bill enhance/increase homeownership, especially Black homeownership in Baltimore, which is a major goal of this Administration?

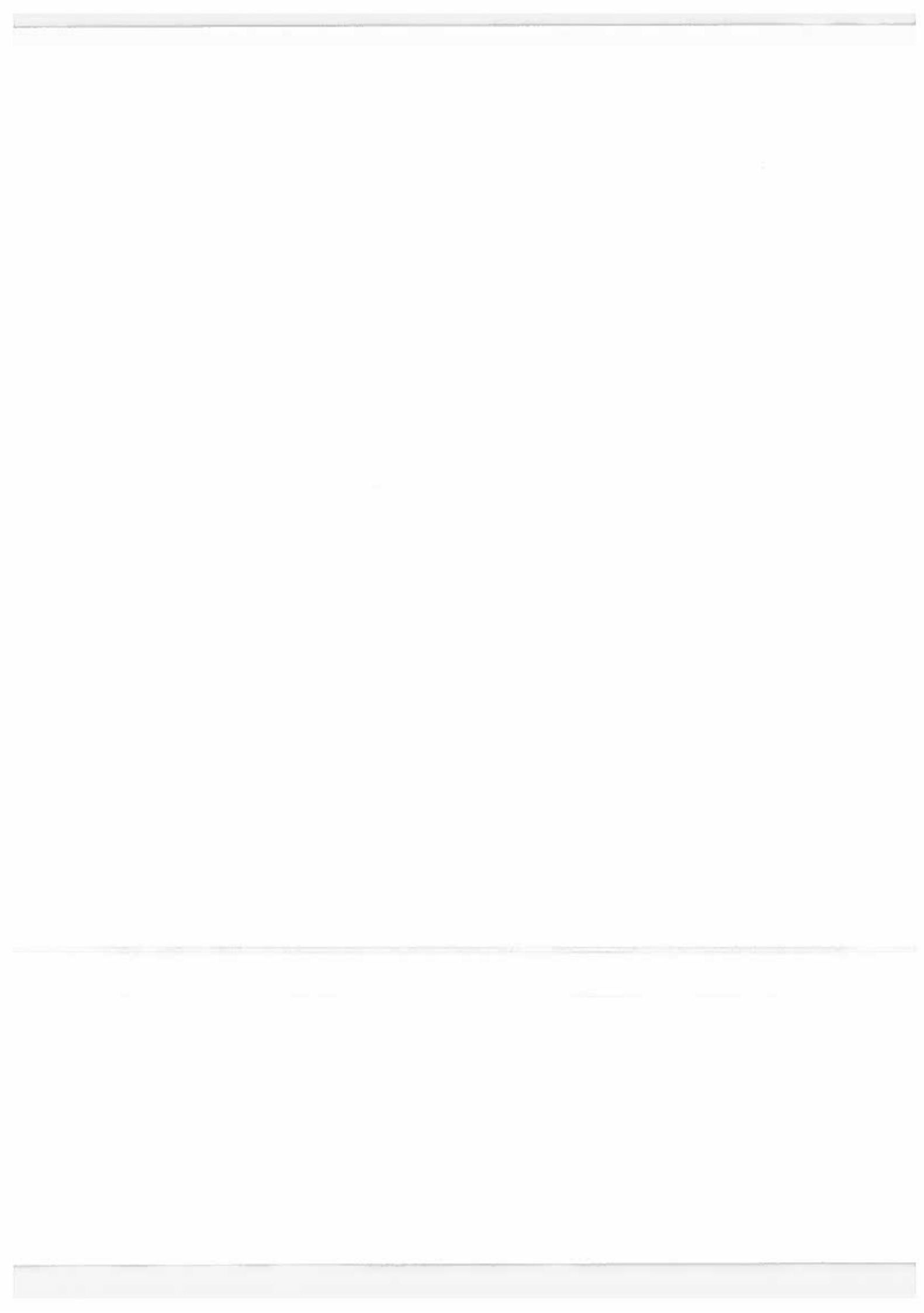
The Bills under consideration have been presented as solutions to problems, but problems for whom?

In fact this bill creates more problems for existing residents. Baltimore is known as a City of Neighborhoods and is blessed with a number of great neighborhoods that have remained stable, livable, affordable and attractive to homebuyers and residents over many decades. Our organization works as a Middle Neighborhoods partner to 11 great neighborhoods in Northwest Baltimore and in our meetings with them, no neighborhood association has supported these bills. Our partner communities are the following Healthy Neighborhoods communities in Northwest Baltimore: Ashburton, Callaway-Garrison, Dorchester, Central Forest Park, Forest Park, Forest Park Golf Course, Concerned Citizens of Forest Park, Garwyn Oaks, Hanlon, Howard Park, West Forest Park, and Hillsdale Heights. These communities are predominantly African American, low to moderate income, middle neighborhoods and comprised of mainly single-family homes. The availability of open, green space is one of the primary attributes individuals and families seek and choose when selecting to live in our Northwest communities.

It was stated in the Baltimore Sun that these bills were “an attempt to address ... structural racism of the past” Since the majority of the residents in our communities, and who own homes are African American, that excuse for this bill is misinformed at best and insulting at worse. Instead, what we hear from residents is their desire to protect, preserve and promote the very qualities and living experiences—the ample open and green space, off street parking and single family homes-- that have made their neighborhoods desirable to homebuyers and residents for generations.

Many voiced confusion and frustration about how these proposals seem to cater more to outside investment interests and the need for potential developers to be profitable than the needs of current residents and to the voices of those who live here. Rather than strengthening neighborhoods, these changes threaten to destabilize them by prioritizing short-term potential development over long-term community sustainability, stability, and security.

City Council Bill 25-0064 proposes amendments to bulk and yard requirements in residential zoning districts. While the changes may appear modest in raw numbers, the percentage increases in lot coverage and reductions in yard space range from 25% to 100% in some cases. These are not minor adjustments-- they represent a significant reduction in open and green space across the city. Decreasing the back and side yard requirements allows developers/builders to build larger buildings on the lots, reducing the green space between homes and in the rear yard. This change reduces open space for families' and individuals' outdoors activities and limits or eliminates



space for off-street parking, which is greatly needed now in our partner communities and communities like ours around the city. .

In meetings with our partner communities, residents expressed concerns about the bill lacked community engagement, input and support, and the residents want to be active participants in policies and zoning changes that impact them and their communities.

In summary, the concerns to be addressed are:

- Focus and beneficiaries of this bill
- Existing residents' interests not being considered nor their input sought before the development of the bill
- Preserving the amenities and quality of life of Baltimore communities
- Removing safeguards that protect neighborhoods from undesirable and unproductive development

Increasing the amount of housing does not necessarily increase homeownership or make it affordable. Equipping homebuyers achieve, grow and maintain financial capacity does. I would recommend the Council investigate and develop programs that can help homebuyers and homeowners in that regard to be able to buy and keep their homes affordably. Baltimore has several housing counseling and community oriented organizations and agencies that can help in that endeavor.

The City constantly asks residents to promote, partner with and support their city. It is now time for our City representatives to do the same for their constituents. We now ask that the City Council listen to and support the residents of the city and oppose this bill. I urge the City Council to prioritize the needs and voices of the Baltimore City residents who currently live here, invest here and are impacted by the changes that happens here and vote no to City Council Bill 25-0064. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Mereida Goodman,

President, Garwyn Oaks United Neighbors Assn.

Executive Director, GO Northwest Housing Resource Center

