

The wrong choice

Mayor Adrian Fenty's nomination of Geoffrey Griffis to a seat on the Zoning Commission has attracted heated debate. A recent council hearing on the selection brought out 34 witnesses, who offered conflicting views about the nominee's expertise, personality and ethics.

The Zoning Commission has weighty responsibilities in drafting the city's zoning regulations and deciding often-controversial applications for planned-unit developments, university expansion and zoning changes. It is essential that all parties believe they will receive a fair hearing.

In comments at Saturday's meeting of the Cleveland Park Citizens Association, the mayor stressed that all of his appointees will fulfill his administration's commitment to listen to the community. But the mayor also said he wanted change on the Board of Zoning Adjustment, which Mr. Griffis has chaired since 2001.

We do not understand the logic of seeking change on the Board of Zoning Adjustment, which decides on variances and special exceptions to the zoning regulations, by shifting Mr. Griffis to the Zoning Commission, with its more expansive responsibilities.

Mr. Griffis' comments at the council hearing in response to Ward 6 Council member Tommy Wells cause us concern. Mr. Griffis refused to commit to altering a loophole in the regulations that allows charter schools to locate in small residential properties. With his comments — as with his actions during the original Board of Zoning Adjustment hearings on the AppleTree Institute for Education Innovation's charter school — Mr. Griffis showed an unwillingness to listen to well-founded community concerns.

Mr. Griffis' professional commitments make his ability to serve questionable. He is managing member of City Partners, which he described as helping develop and design residential, commercial and mixed-use projects, including some that involve city-owned property. We also question the wisdom — regardless of the legality — of his raising funds for the Fenty campaign while serving as a member of the Board of Zoning Adjustment.

We urge Mayor Fenty to withdraw the nomination and look elsewhere for a Zoning Commission appointee.