

# The Committee of 100

on the Federal City



## Testimony Before the Historic Preservation Review Board on Barry Farm (HPA 19-07) July 25, 2019

The Committee of 100 (C100) believes that what still remains of Barry Farm represents a significant period of socio-economic history of the African-American population in DC and should be added to the DC Inventory of Historic Sites. As demonstrated in the nomination, Barry Farm played a significant role in social justice, not just for the city, but for the country. It was home to persons involved in landmark court decisions and the formation of local and national groups in the fight for social justice and equality.

We strongly believe that this important history needs to be physically preserved. What remains of Barry Farm is too important in the development of this city to go completely under the bulldozer and be forgotten.

Of the original 442 Barry Farm dwelling units, the remaining handful listed in the nomination are the last, and the last that embody the history that is laid out in the nomination.

This nomination poses a challenge – can or should we try to capture and preserve some of the physical history of Barry Farm? But, it is not so much preserving just the physical buildings themselves, their quantity, or quality and integrity, but also what they represent.

Traditionally, historic preservation has focused on saving buildings. The HPO Staff Report states that the integrity of these remaining buildings is compromised. We'll admit these buildings are not of much architectural significance unto themselves— of concrete block and low-cost construction. But, whatever integrity they had that is lost, it can be easily restored – windows, doors, and roofs replaced, and stucco removed. So, integrity should not be much of an issue.

Along with the remaining buildings, we can add their massing, orientation and location, and the layout of the streets named for anti-slavery legislators, all of which remain unchanged. So, this nomination is also seeking the preservation of the form and setting of a unique place that helped to define and shape an important community.

We argue that what still remains of Barry Farm meets the criteria for inclusion in the DC Inventory of Historic Sites:

- (1) It is associated with [events](#) that contributed significantly to the heritage, culture and development of the District of Columbia; namely the *Bolling v. Sharpe* case that extended the Supreme Court's *Brown v. Board of Education* decision to the District's schools.
- (2) It is associated with historical periods, social movements, groups, institutions, achievements, or patterns of growth and change that contributed significantly to the heritage, culture or development of the District of Columbia or the nation;

In terms of patterns of growth and change, Barry Farm represents an historical pattern of how land in the District was designated to house black families; the creation of low-income permanent public

housing during World War II when most of the city's market-rate housing, even for lower income residents, barred black occupancy.

In terms of social movements, Barry Farm became the site of a nationally-recognized tenant organizing effort led by Stevens Road residents. This activism around welfare and tenants' rights led to the establishment of DC's Citywide Welfare Alliance and the formation of the National Welfare Rights Organization.

(3) It is associated with the lives of, and were the homes of persons significant to the history of the District of Columbia and the nation. The remaining houses include the actual homes of welfare rights activist and founding member of the National Welfare Rights Organization (NWRO) Etta Horn, as well as at least four *Bolling v. Sharpe* plaintiffs whose parents moved to Barry Farm in the 1940s.

The HPRB now must decide if some of last physical remains of this important history should be preserved and not be plowed under the soil with the rest and forgotten.

Thank you.

Stephen A. Hansen, Chair  
Committee of 100 on the Federal City