

The Committee of 100 on the Federal City



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February 28, 2012

Founded 1923

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Rep. Nicholas Rahall
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Washington, DC 20515

Del. Eleanor Holmes Norton
Rayburn House Office Building
Room 2136
Independence and S. Capitol St., SW
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Rep. Rahall and Del. Norton:

On behalf of the Committee of 100 on the Federal City, I would like to commend you for your interest in the complex set of development proposals related to Union Station. Your decision to pursue an audit of the operations of the government-sponsored corporation that oversees Union Station is an important step to bringing order to what we believe has been a haphazard process.

We recognize that there are a number of interests, agencies and organizations that need to cooperate in dealing with the site. As a building listed on the National Register of Historic Places, and the work of one of our nation's pre-eminent architects, the building itself is not only significant but has taken on an iconic status appreciated by both DC residents and the many travelers and tourists it serves.

Beyond simply a beautiful building, however, Union Station serves an important function. As one of the busiest train stations in the United States, and as a multi-modal transportation center involving buses, DC Metro, automobiles, bicycles, pedestrians, and eventually streetcars, the building serves an enormous population. Its added retail functions bring life to the space and its location on one of the busiest avenues, within view of the Capitol, and the bustling H Street corridor only add to the case that any development deserves careful consideration.

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Several potential projects are in the works that, in the view of the Committee of 100, need leadership and coordinated planning. One entity is planning the construction of an enormous office tower to the rear of the building above the railroad tracks, another entity is proposing interior modifications to the station to enhance the retail programming at the expense of the transportation functions, another entity is trying to figure out how to incorporate the H Street Streetcar into the mix, and another entity is restoring the long neglected traffic circle facing Massachusetts Avenue. Yet nobody seems interested in how a world-class transportation center should operate, serve the public, and be a sustainable economic force – taking into account the needs of riders, shoppers, tenants, security, visitors, trains, trolleys, buses, taxis and cars.

Because of the multitude of involved entities, a complex myriad of reviews involving DC Government, the National Park Service, AMTRAK, the building tenants, the leasing company, the government-sponsored corporation, the National Capital Planning Commission, and countless other agencies, - few of which seem to communicate with each other, has created an environment of confusion and has bred a nightmare of overlapping jurisdictions and competing agendas. As a result, the public ends up as the de-facto coordinator and arbiter for the conflicting projects – trying to interpret how they overlap for themselves. This is not how wise decisions are made.

Once again, we applaud your concern and would support any efforts to bring order and comprehensive review to this process. Should you have any questions, or would like further information, please do not hesitate to call upon us.

Sincerely,



George Clark
Chair, Committee of 100 on the Federal City

The Committee of 100, founded in 1923, advocates responsible planning and land use in Washington, D.C. Our work is guided by the values inherited from the L'Enfant Plan and McMillan Commission, which give Washington its historic distinction and natural beauty, while responding to the special challenges of 21st century development. We pursue these goals through public education, research and civic action, and we celebrate the city's unique role as both the home of the District's citizens and the capital of our nation.