

The Committee of 100 on the Federal City



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Eric D. Shaw
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Dear Mr. Shaw,

Thank you for the time you and your staff have spent briefing the Committee of 100 on the Office of Planning's (OP) process and progress. I am writing now to let you know our views at this stage of the Comprehensive Plan amendment process while we await the release of the draft framework.

Our involvement in the Comprehensive Plan amendment cycle will be guided by the values of the L'Enfant-McMillan Plans, the discipline of the Height Act, and respect for the District's dual nature as national capital and local hometown. At the same time, it will also reflect the perspective on issues that C100 now embraces, including climate change, housing, and transportation.

We envision an amended Plan that includes and inspires all residents and stakeholders. The amended Plan should accommodate growth while respecting the District's built assets and national environment. Most of all, the Plan must respect both current, as well as future residents of the District of Columbia. Under these broad goals, we expect to focus on the following areas during this amendment cycle: (1) creating inclusive, successful neighborhoods; (2) strengthening historic districts and other resources; (3) building a working transportation system; and (4) fostering a resilient environment. This letter summarizes our principal thoughts about these issues, which we will follow up later with specific proposed text and map amendments.

1. Creating inclusive, successful neighborhoods

Affordable housing. The District has experienced massive displacement of low and very-low income residents, some of which occurred as a direct and intended result of the successful implementation of Plan policies, such as "Strengthening the

Central Core." We will promote policies that usefully supplement affordable housing provided through inclusionary zoning and planned unit developments.

Neighborhood protection. Low- and moderate-density neighborhoods are under siege, commonly confronting massive new developments on adjacent commercial corridors, despite the Plan's provisions for step-down heights and buffering. For example, the recent Zoning Commission ruling making 5,000 square feet the default minimum lot size for Planned Unit Developments in much of the District is a stress factor burdening these communities. Therefore, we will seek amendments that make good on LU-2's "commitment to sustaining neighborhood diversity and protecting the defining characteristics of each community."

2. Strengthening historic districts and resources

The overarching goal for historic preservation is and must remain that of preserving and enhancing "the unique cultural heritage, beauty, and identity of the District of Columbia by respecting the historic physical form of the city and the enduring value of its historic structures and places" (Plan at HP 100.1.) Under this guiding statement, we will support or suggest policies that: respect view sheds, streetscapes, and neighborhood character within and outside historic districts, and protect against intrusions that affect residents' and visitors' enjoyment of these unique vistas; maintain the District's essentially horizontal character and gear building heights to adhere to the Height Act and to neighborhood character, and strengthen placing value on the "recent past" and on neighborhood specific historic resources.

3. Building a working transportation system

DC residents' transportation options. The 2006 Plan aimed to reduce single-occupant car trips within the District by residents by, among other means, encouraging walkable neighborhoods; facilitating bicycle use; restricting the availability and affordability of parking; and building multi-modal transportation hubs. These policies should continue, but with the recognition that many neighborhoods lack accessibility to reliable mass transit or are not pedestrian friendly. Also, Metrorail's current operating problems and the streetcar system's slow launch are negatively affecting the anticipated capacity of these transit modes in the near term.

Commuter rail expansion. Seventy-five percent of the cars on DC's streets during the daytime are non-DC vehicles. Thus, providing practical alternatives to suburban commuters has greater potential to reduce congestion than does getting District residents out of their cars. Commuter rail has the capability to move more commuters than any other alternative to cars. Also, several Metrorail stations in downtown DC are at or near capacity and even with planned improvements, their capacity will soon be exceeded. In these circumstances, we encourage commuter rail with policies that acknowledge the important contribution it can provide to reducing automobile congestion and pollution, and that recognize its cost effectiveness.

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4. Fostering a resilient environment

We applaud the new multi-faceted Resilience Element. Our principal recommendations at this time concern the city's ability to adapt to climate change. Fortunately, recent planning efforts by the D.C. Department of Energy and the Environment (DDOE) and the D.C. Department of Transportation (DDOT) have resulted in commendable recommendations upon which the Plan can draw.

The challenges of climate change underscore the importance of setting and working toward ambitious goals. To this end, C100's Parks and Environment Subcommittee has completed a detailed study on how the District can adapt to climate change, with proposed policies and action items to inform the new Resiliency Element. We will be providing this study under separate cover.

These are our thoughts at this juncture of the amendment process. Once again, thank you for the time and assistance you have provided the C100 to help us understand the process your office will follow in development Plan amendments. This is an important endeavor that will shape the future of our city and we are eager to work with you on it.

Sincerely,



Stephen A. Hansen, Chair

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