

# The Committee of 100

on the Federal City



## Committee of 100 Candidate Questionnaire - June 2024 Primary – Member-at-Large

### Planning and Zoning

1. Over the past 15 years the Office of Planning has supported maximum zoning allowances, smaller residential units, and luxury amenities as priorities in revitalizing neighborhoods. Significant displacement of Black residents and businesses has followed. What three changes to planning and zoning would you recommend that will address growth and change while maintaining the culture, history, and demographic of DC’s neighborhoods?

#### Rodney Red Grant:

Generally, planning and zoning need to be considered in a synergistic way and tandem. We need to modernize our infrastructure while maintaining our city’s unique charm and history.

I. I would highly emphasize planning surrounding refurbishing vacant homes, so we can build on our existing infrastructure.

II. I would highly incentivize mixed-use zoning so that buildings could have dual functions or purposes.

III. I would also incentivize investment into green technology so that we can reduce our carbon footprint and reduce our dependency on fossil fuels, while also driving costs down.

#### Robert White:

I. Build first. Before the DC Housing Authority may remove residents (for redevelopment) require DCHA to provide comparable housing to residents — in the same neighborhood where the residents now live.

II. Instead of requiring or supporting affordable housing, in general, require large percentages of two and three bedroom units.

III. Make affordable housing downtown a priority, not only to help revitalize downtown, but to put affordable housing residents close to work and transit opportunities.

2. Would you support the creation of an independent Planning Commission? Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_  
Please explain your answer.

**Rodney Red Grant:**

Yes. The creation of an Independent Planning Commission would be beneficial to not only provide oversight, but to help liaison issues surrounding zoning, planning, etc. with from the constituents to the decision-makers who are elected to represent them.

**Robert White:**

No. Currently, the DC Office of Planning reports to the Deputy Mayor for Planning and Economic Development. This unduly focusses Planning priorities on economic development at the expense of other priorities. I support an independent Office of Planning. Only after giving that option a chance to succeed would I support a Planning Commission.

3. Do you support retaining the current Height Act? Yes\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_  
Please explain your answer.

**Rodney Red Grant:**

Yes. The Height Act coupled with an approach where we build on existing infrastructure will ensure we are not pushing resources to where they do not need to go. Repealing the Height Act will remove one identifying key feature characteristic of our city. Secondly, policy can't just sound nice in theory, we have to be realistic about the long-term outcomes of our decisions, the group best suited and able to build large-scale development projects are not small business owners, small contractors, or the mid to lower tier sectors of our city's economy. Repealing the Height Act would have to come with some very careful thought, and why an Independent Planning Commission would also be warranted.

**Robert White:**

Yes. Part of DC's beauty is that no building may be taller than the Washington Monument. I would like to preserve that image for the District.

**Downtown**

4. Aside from office to residential conversions, what do you believe are the best solutions to the hollowing out of downtown?

**Rodney Red Grant:**

We know we are not receiving traffic downtown, whether it is by foot, or by car. However, when the holiday market is set up, there is always a strong showing for that period right in our downtown district, bordering Chinatown and Penn Quarter. This is where we need to be creative and reimagine some of our city spaces. Limiting car traffic at certain times and embracing a city square concept in the warmer months would revitalize our downtown community. It is a central walking location and easily accessible by metro.

**Robert White:**

Downtown should be a hub for art and music. I would encourage a theater district, an arts district and live music coming out of many, many venues.  
In addition, DC should be a place where people (including families) want to live. This means ensuring amenities such as schools, parks and all manner of shops.

## Neighborhoods

5. It is an established fact that Wards 7 and 8 lag behind the other Wards in terms of services and amenities, such as grocery stores, comprehensive health care and restaurants. What do you think can be done to bring real racial and economic equity to these Wards?

### Rodney Red Grant:

We need to explore adding more access points in healthcare and food deserts in Wards 7 and 8. Some programs in DC provide services that go to the individual, we should focus on trying to add programming such as this, where we know access points are limited for things such as groceries and healthcare.

### Robert White:

An important reason that I first ran for office was that lack of opportunities east of the Anacostia River. I was working for Delegate Eleanor Holmes Norton at that time — on many projects that helped DC to grow and thrive. Yet, those projects had virtually no impact on my neighborhood.

With respect to health care, I favor an approach long espoused by Council Member Vincent Gray: The need east of the Anacostia is not just for a hospital — but for a health care system that integrates the hospital with a wide range of community based health care services. That integration is yet to be achieved. I wanted to change that consideration, and I still do.

To stimulate the growth of market-based services, such as grocery stores and restaurants, I favor subsidies that will enable businesses to survive their initial years of operation east of the Anacostia.

Finally, since fresh food is so important to a family's health and well-being, I strongly support food distribution programs such as the one that Martha's Table operates on Elvans Road and elsewhere in DC.

## Transportation

6. What can be done to support MetroRail and MetroBus considering the reduced ridership from the pandemic and the potential reduction in federal subsidies? What should the Council do to ensure funding of DC's share of WMATA's costs?

### Rodney Red Grant:

We believe that by focusing on vocational education and helping to restore our city's infrastructure through smart programming and giving people the skills they need to become self-sufficient, we can ultimately add to our city's revenues through a combination of business growth and additional tax surpluses. We would then convert these funds into our public infrastructure, such as, MetroRail, MetroBus, and maybe most importantly, MetroAccess, due to the vulnerability of the population it serves.

### Robert White:

Thriving MetroRail and MetroBus operations are necessary for DC's economic and ecological well being. Funding for Metro's basic operations must be assured, either through general fund expenditures or through funding from dedicated sources. I favor a region-wide approach to dedicated funding.

In addition, I support free or nearly free mass transit options — for the sake of public transit users and also to keep streets open for those who choose to use (or must use) cars and trucks.

7. More than 60% of the vehicles on DC streets are commuters from outside the District. Both MARC and VRE are planning significant increases in commuter rail traffic coming into and through DC, which should reduce the number of commuters driving into the District. For example, Virginia is investing about \$2 billion to construct a second Potomac River rail bridge and expand the L'Enfant VRE Commuter Rail Station. Should DC more actively support the development of commuter rail? Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_ If your answer is yes, what steps should DC take?

**Rodney Red Grant:**

No. DC should focus on DC first, but also understand what is practical and efficient. If we focused on expanding DC housing and making it affordable while also improving our infrastructure through mixed-use planning and more progressive zoning, we could limit commuters period, because the people driving here to work, could simply live and work here.

**Robert White:**

Yes. The DC - Maryland - Virginia region needs a comprehensive approach to funding all mass transit. DC officials must work with Maryland and Virginia colleagues to develop such a system, specifically one that includes support for commuter rail.

8. Should the existing 2.5-mile streetcar line on H Street NE continue in operation, or be dismantled and replaced with buses? Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_ Please explain your answer.

**Rodney Red Grant:**

Yes. I would dismantle it and replace it with Circulator buses that are clean, efficient, and don't have as many issues. I have firsthand seen accidents involving the street car, for example, something as simple as someone leaving their car parked illegally will hold up the entire street car for however long that person does not return to their vehicle, or someone tows the vehicle. Either way, it isn't efficient and there are better ways to help people transverse the H Street Corridor while providing less public hassle.

**Robert White:**

Yes. In many jurisdictions, including DC, streetcars have been an incentive for economic development. For that reason, I would seriously consider extending the streetcar line into Ward 7. On the other hand, once continuing economic development along the streetcar lines can be assured, I would be open to streetcar alternatives.

9. The installation of bike lanes around the city has resulted in strong opposition. Different stakeholders say their interests have been ignored and they are now less safe and less welcome in these areas. What are your views? Are you aware of any data that show that bike lanes have resulted in increased bicycle use and safety? Do you think an evaluation of newly installed bicycle lanes should be conducted (considering such factors as increases in bike ridership; rider, pedestrian, car safety; reduced traffic, etc.) before there is any expansion?

**Rodney Red Grant:**

We should coordinate a study of the roads in DC most utilized using bicycles and with the less reported incidents, then view the set up of those roads, and aggregate all the points we like, and discard the ones we don't. Although, it would seem a pretty safe and co-habitational way to add protected bike lanes is to structure the road from the sidewalk outwards, with the bike lane, then parked cars, then the roadway. This ensures that bicyclists have a physical barrier from harm, which is simply just a rerouting of design, that is cost-effective and protective for the community at large.

**Robert White:**

I only support expanding bike lanes on a case-by-case basis and with extensive input from all stakeholders. A particular concern of mine: assuring the safety of all pedestrians, including as they attempt to enter or exit buses.

**Historic Preservation**

10. Historic preservation is a hallmark of DC's development history. Do you have any concerns about protecting the integrity of landmarks and historic districts as the city continues to grow?  
Please explain.

**Rodney Red Grant:**

There is always concern regarding preserving our city's beautiful architectural landscape. However, education is a piece of the puzzle not often mentioned. Sometimes people do not even realize what portions of the city are historic or for what reason. The DC Historical Society should be given more priority so that they can conduct more programming such as oral history projects. Once we uncover the rich cultural history behind the city's infrastructure, people will certainly appreciate it more. Then we can rally more so for funding, grants, and public support, to try and prevent historic properties, homes, and neighborhoods, from being knocked down for development reasons. There is a saying that all people die twice, once when they leave this world, and once when their name is uttered for the last time. Let us not let our city's history fade because we fail to recognize and utter the importance of certain portions of it.

**Robert White:**

I favor the preservation of historic landmarks and neighborhoods. Furthermore, I believe that we can increase popular support for historic preservation by affording some flexibility in the administration of the program: For example, instead of being required to use wooden window frames, property owners should have the option of using other materials — so long as those materials have the same look and feel as wood.

**Affordable Housing**

11. What tools and investments are needed to maintain housing affordability or increase affordable housing opportunities throughout the city?

**Rodney Red Grant:**

We need to build on existing programs. For instance, the HELP USA Walter Reed Program in DC at 1324 Main Dr. NW, is a hybrid public-private home where several partners have come together to provide housing to Veterans who typically do not qualify for other Veterans' housing resources. However, there have been many people who have advised our team that there are issues with that facility and that tenants have no voice to express concerns there. Putting a spotlight on facilities such as this with further oversight to produce accountability, and discussion, such as this, is how we solve problems.

**Robert White:**

The District should make greater use of DOPA, the District Opportunity to Purchase Act, which gives the DC Government certain rights of first refusal. When the hotel right at the Woodley Park Metro Station came available for sale, the DC Government should have stepped in, with an eye towards utilizing the property for affordable housing. DC now has a similar opportunity to utilize the Hotel Harrington which now is on the market.

In addition, as a matter of racial and economic equity, deeply affordable housing units must be distributed equitably — into every ward and neighborhood.

12. Whom do you think DC's rent control regulation DC benefits? Would you support expanding the program to multi-family buildings built before 2005?

**Rodney Red Grant:**

Rent control legislation can be beneficial, but can also produce harmful results for the economy at large. General fairness principles need to apply to every rent control measure, but, there are a lot of exclusions in DC's rent control infrastructure. Streamlining the DC code and regulations surrounding rent control, as a whole, will help tenants understand their rights, and what to look for if they feel like they are not receiving the end of the bargain for which they paid.

**Robert White:**

Rent control benefits those living in rent-controlled units, but not only those residents. By maintaining modest prices in some units, rent control can have an overall effect of moderating the prices of nearby units.

Yes, I support expanding the program to units built before 2005, and I support changing the law so each year additional properties fall within the scope of rent control.

13. Interest has been expressed by the Council in eliminating single-family zoning as one way to address the shortage of affordable housing. What is your thinking on this strategy, and on what data do you base your conclusion?

**Rodney Red Grant:**

Eliminating single-family zoning still doesn't help people who can't aggregate the funds to pay a high enough down payment for a property in an expensive city with mortgage rates at

this time being as high as they are. Adding multi-use and creative housing options where we convert large buildings that have diminished in use would be better than limiting the private sector. We can create space without limiting opportunity or options for others.

**Robert White:**

Zoning for single family housing, particularly zoning that requires very large lots, can be a tool for economic and, thus, racial segregation. Rather than a total ban on single-family zoning, I support neighborhood-by-neighborhood reviews of the economic and racial impact of single-family zoning — with extensive stakeholder involvement and with the goal of racial equity in mind.

### **RFK Stadium Site**

14. If the District acquires the RFK Stadium property, for what purposes would you want it used?

**Rodney Red Grant:**

A multi-faceted, state-of-the-art, and high-tech vocational training school where the youth of DC from all over the city can attend hybrid, hands-on learning, and training programs, to gain certificates, so that they can be workforce-ready, if they decide to not attend college, or even if they do, the choice will be theirs. We would be the first city of its kind to attempt to unify our city at a young age through hybrid learning. The future of our city's tapestry and cultural quilt would have an unknown ceiling and would be unlimited in potential.

**Robert White:**

I favor creating a neighborhood abundant with affordable housing and with all the shopping, education and recreation amenities that a neighborhood needs.

15. Do you support the District subsidizing a new football stadium in the District for the Washington Commanders? Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

**Rodney Red Grant:**

No. Professional sports stadiums don't yield the net benefits that people think they do. We could utilize that funding for smarter investment programs. Not every dollar, is a dollar. If you put \$1 into education, it will yield more dollars in benefit results, than if you put \$1 into speed cameras, for instance.

**Robert White:**

No.